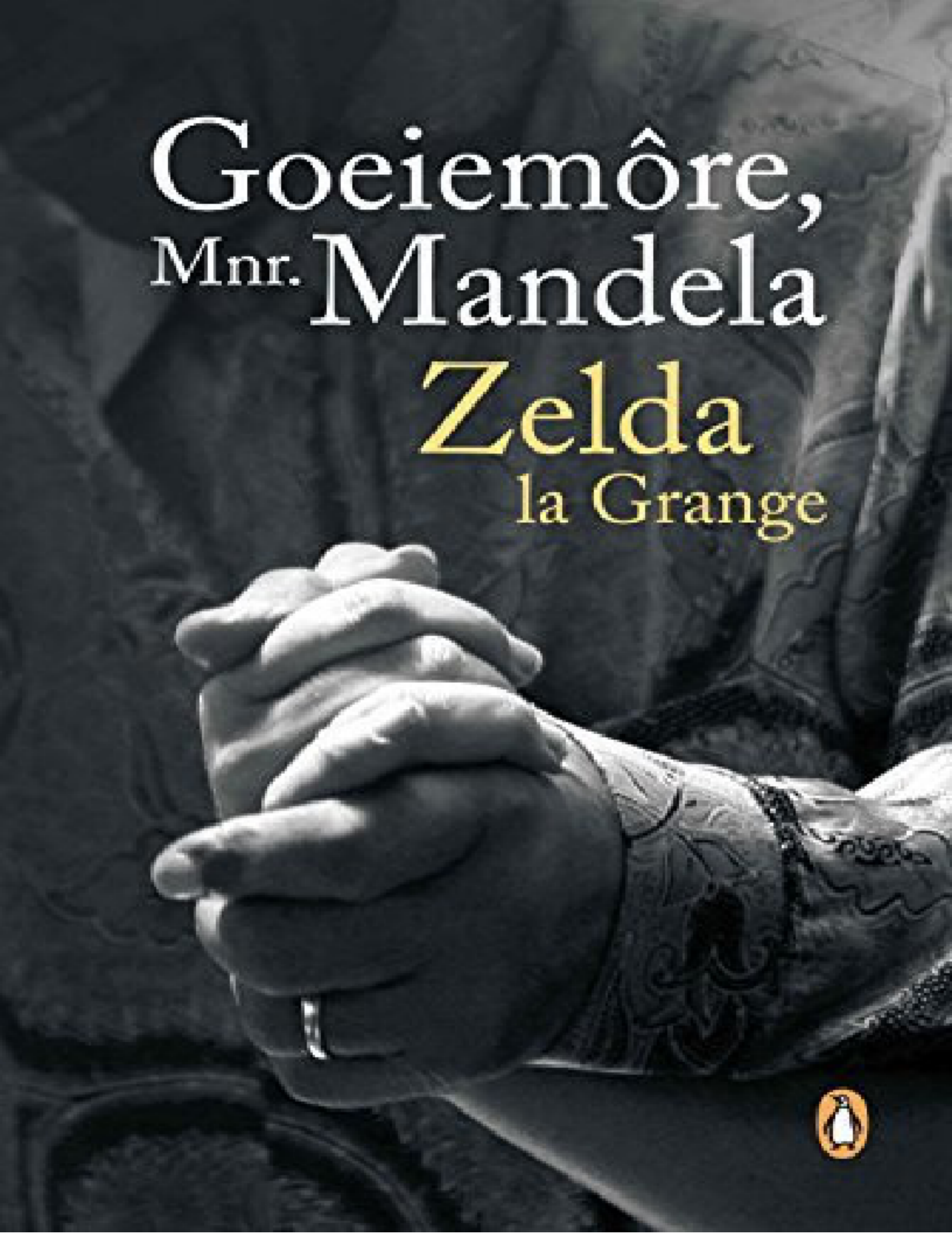
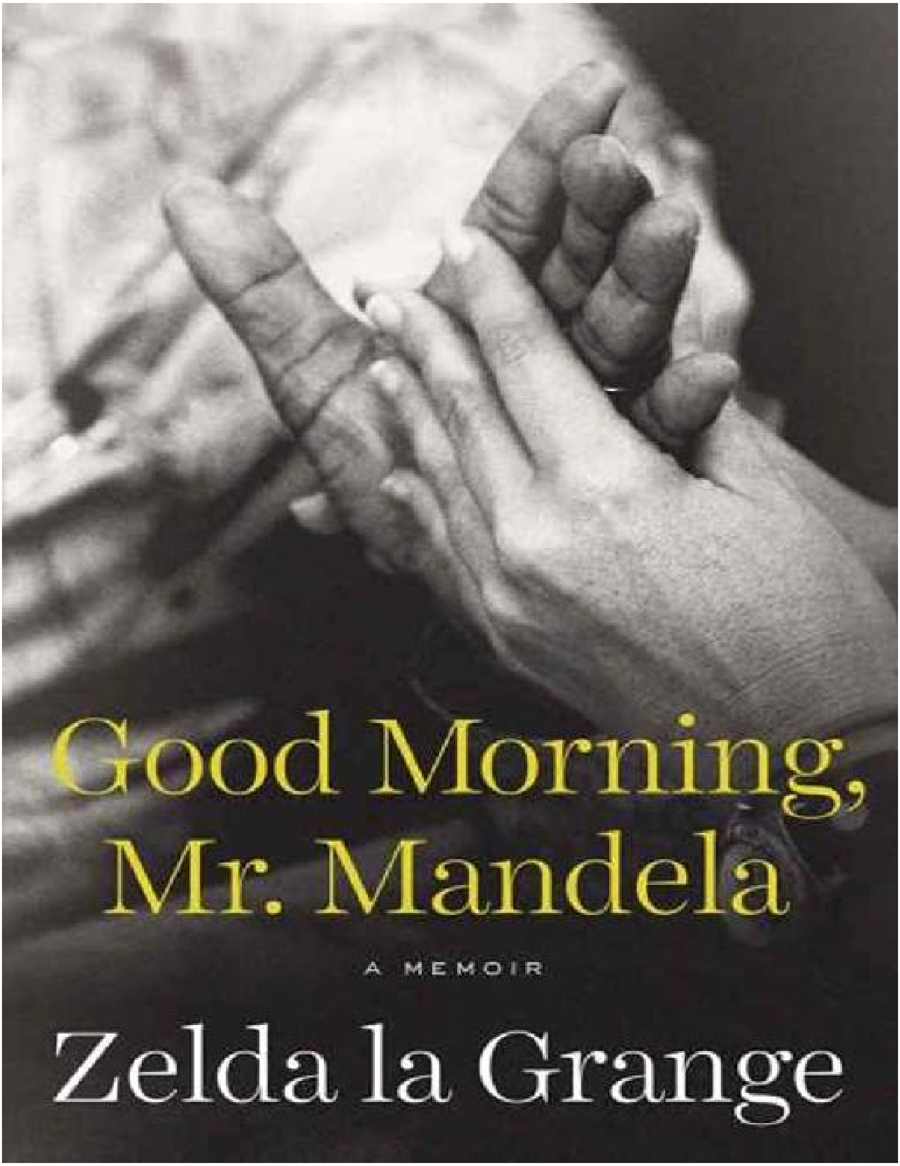

Goeiemôre,
Mnr. Mandela
Zelda
la Grange

Table of Contents

- PART ONE
  - 1
  - 2
- PART TWO
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5
  - 6
- PART THREE
  - 7
  - 8
  - 9
  - 10
- PART FOUR
  - 11
  - 12
  - 13


Good Morning,
Mr. Mandela
A MEMOIR
Zelda la Grange

VIKING

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Group (USA) LLC

375 Hudson Street

New York, New York 10014

USA | Canada | UK | Ireland | Australia | New Zealand | India | South Africa | China

penguin.com

A Penguin Random House Company

First published by Viking Penguin, a member of Penguin Group (USA) LLC, 2014

Grateful acknowledgment is given to the following for permission to reproduce copyrighted material.

Every effort has been made to contact copyright holders. The author and publisher would be glad to amend in future editions any errors or omissions brought to their attention. Unless otherwise indicated, photos are courtesy of the author.

Image 4 © Sunday Times South Africa

Image 5 © Christiaan Kotze/Foto24

Image 9 © The Clinton Foundation

Image 12 © Reuters/Siphiwe Sibeko

Image 13 © Halden Krog

Image 15 © Anton Corbijn

Image 16 © Alet van Huyssteen and the Nelson Mandela Foundation

Image 17 © Alet van Huyssteen and the Nelson Mandela Foundation Sunday Times

ISBN 978-0-698-18580-7

Version_1

ZELDA LA GRANGE

Afrikaanse vertaling deur Tinus Horn

Goeiemôre, mnr. Mandela

In *Goeiemôre, mnr. Mandela* vertel Zelda la Grange die merkwaardige verhaal van ’n lewe aan die sy van ’n man wat ons al twee geken en liefgehad het. Dit is ’n eerbewys aan hulle albei – aan Madiba se oog vir talent en sy vermoë om te vertrou, en Zelda se durf om ’n groot uitdaging te aanvaar, en haar vermoë om as mens te groei. Die storie wys hoe kragtig politiek kan wees wanneer ’n mens dit persoonlik maak, en herinner ons aan die lesse wat Madiba ons almal geleer het.

President Bill Clinton

Zelda la Grange het ’n sonderlinge perspektief op Nelson Mandela as sy persoonlike assistent, vertroueling en goeie vriend oor baie jare. Vir ons is sy ’n geliefde vriendin en ’n maatstaf vir almal wat Madiba liefgehad het. Die verhaal van die reis wat hulle meegemaak het wys hoe ’n man wat ’n hele nasie verander het ook die mag gehad het om die lewe van een uitsonderlike vrou te verander.

Morgan Freeman en Lori McCreary (Akteur, vervaardiger, *Invictus*)

Leierskap is die uitsonderlikste hulpbron in die wêreld. Die vermoë om die beste en mees bevoegde mense aan te spoor om die gemeenskap te dien. Nelson Mandela het dit op regeringsvlak met sy

amptelike kabinet vermag, maar ook in sy 'kombuiskabinet'; sy vertroude raadgewers. Zelda se siening van sy buitengewone impak is ongeëwenaard persoonlik. Haar leierskap en diens is ook uit die boonste rakke.

Bono (U2-sanger en medestigter van ONE)


N
ZIMBABWE
BOTSWANA
MOZAMBIQUE
NAMIBIA
Pretoria
Johannesburg
SWAZILAND
LESOTHO
ATLANTIC OCEAN
SOUTH AFRICA
INDIAN OCEAN
Umtata
Qunu
East London
Cape Town
0 100 200 miles
0 100 200 300 km

Author's Note

In June 2013 the son of the ANC stalwart Oliver Tambo, Dali Tambo, conducted an interview with President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe. Mugabe said: Nelson Mandela is too much of a saint. He has been too good to white people at the expense of blacks in his own country. Some agreed while others protested. To some extent I think the man had a point. It could well have been perceived that way. And yet, in a conversation with Richard Stengel, quoted in Conversations With Myself, Madiba himself said a long time ago, 'People will feel I see too much good in people. So it's a criticism I have to put up with and I've tried to adjust to, because whether it is so or not, it is something which I think is profitable. It's a good thing to assume, to act on the basis that . . . others are men of integrity and honour . . . because you tend to attract integrity and honour if that is how you regard those with whom you work.'

Somehow in the Mugabe interview I felt responsible for this perception that he has been too good to white people. Indeed he has been too good to me, but I want to believe that he felt proud of how he changed this insignificant life. He often said that if you change one person for the better, you have done your duty. He has not only changed my life but millions of others. He has done way beyond what is expected of a single human being and perhaps for that he deserves to be hailed as a saint after all.

In another conversation with Richard Stengel, Madiba said, 'Your duty is to work with human beings as human beings, not because you think they are angels. And, therefore, once you know that this man has got this virtue and he has got this weakness you work with them and you accommodate that weakness and you try and help him to overcome that weakness. I don't want to be frightened by the fact that a person has made certain mistakes and he has got human frailties. I

can't allow myself to be influenced by that. And that is why many people criticize me.'

I try not to think 'Why me?', to understand why Nelson Mandela chose me. If I do, I think of these quotes above. In the nineteen years we spent together he learned my weaknesses, he learned my strengths, and he invested in my strengths to make me the person I am today.

I served him for almost twenty years and was his PA until he left us on 5 December 2013. In 2009 I decided to start writing this book to pay tribute to him. I mostly wanted to record my experiences in the hope that others would be changed and influenced by my story too. My book is therefore a tribute to Khulu, as I knew him.

This is not his story. This is my story, and I am content with it. But the reader may be disappointed if they expect me to wash too much dirty laundry in public. I would not disrespect the trust Nelson Mandela had invested in me. That is the biggest honour he could have bestowed on me – to trust me – and I intend to cherish that for the rest of my life. What I decided to write about and what I decided to omit as far as he is concerned is based on that trust. It is therefore not a tell-all book.

It is also not a book of great political insights or a thematic dissection of his life. It's a simple story of my experiences with him. One of the most important lessons I have learned from this great man over the years, reaffirmed by his wife Graça Machel to me later in life, is that you only have one person to account to and that is yourself. You have to go to bed at night with your own thoughts and conscience, and after writing this book I need to feel the comfort of a pillow of a clear conscience. I need to make him proud because as much as it feels that our lives were overshadowed by negativity and turmoil over the last couple of years, there is a beautiful story to be told, and I need to admit that I am part of that story and that it is my duty to tell that story. Above all, I need to know in my heart that if he had to read this book he would be happy with what I told and he would agree with the detail, and spending sixteen of the last nineteen years with him, day in, day out, I know what he would be comfortable with in the public domain and what he would not, and that is what is mine to protect.

The book is therefore a collection of anecdotes, sometimes at my own expense, of a road well travelled. No regrets and only lessons to be learned. I am an emotional billionaire, and if nothing extraordinary happens to me for the rest of my life I will still be content with my

memories until the day I die. I have had a rich life. Most people will not experience what I have been witness to, and my story is therefore one of change, of slow metamorphoses of the mind and a belief system to where I am today. The reader has to decide if there is any part he or she can identify with or lessons they can learn from my story. It is not for me to decide.

It would also be incorrect to assume that I was the only one, or a special one, around Madiba. I played a particular role in his life, mostly concerned with his public life. But there are many others, household staff, office staff, security and medical personnel, who played equally important roles in his life and who he was totally dependent upon. Some of them are included in my story but I simply couldn't pay tribute to each and every one of them.

I have tried my best without exception and that is the best I have to give. I hope to contribute to Nelson Mandela's legacy in a small way by sharing the privileges and experiences I have had to anyone open to receiving them. If I change one life by touching another with my story, I have done my duty.

* * *

I remain grateful and indebted for ever . . .

Boodskap van die skrywer

In Junie 2013 het Dali Tambo, seun van die ANC-oudstryder Oliver Tambo, 'n onderhoud met president Robert Mugabe van Zimbabwe gevoer. Mugabe het gesê Nelson Mandela is te veel van 'n heilige. Hy was te goed vir wit mense, ten koste van swart mense in sy eie land. Party mense het saamgestem en ander het beswaar gemaak. Ek dink tot 'n sekere mate was Mugabe reg. Dit sou maklik wees om dit so te sien. En tog, in 'n gesprek met Richard Stengel wat in die boek *Conversations with Myself* aangehaal word, het Madiba self lank gelede gesê: 'Mense sal voel ek sien te veel van die goeie in die mens raak.

Dis 'n stukkie kritiek waarmee ek moet saamleef en waarby ek probeer aanpas, want of dit waar is of nie, dis iets wat ek dink in 'n mens se guns kan tel. Dis 'n goeie ding om te aanvaar; om op te tree asof … ander mense eerbaar is en integriteit het … omdat 'n mens geneig is om eerbaarheid en integriteit na jou aan te lok wanneer jy dit verwag van mense saam met wie jy werk.'

Terwyl Mugabe gepraat het, het ek om een of ander rede gevoel dis my skuld dat mense dink Madiba was te goed vir wit mense. Hy was baie goed vir my, maar ek sou graag wou glo hy was trots op die manier waarop hy hierdie onbenullige lewe verander het. Hy het gereeld gesê 'n mens het jou plig gedoen as jy een mens ten goede verander het. Hy het nie net my lewe verander nie, maar ook dié van miljoene ander mense. Hy het baie meer gedoen as wat 'n mens van enigiemand kan verwag. Miskien is dit genoeg rede om hom tog maar tot heilige te wil verklaar.

In 'n ander gesprek met Richard Stengel het Madiba gesê: 'Jou plig is om mense soos mense te behandel, nie omdat jy dink hulle is engele nie. Wanneer jy weet dat 'n man sy goeie eienskappe en swakhede het, kan jy met hom werk en jou met daardie swakhede versoen, en hom probeer help om dit te oorwin. Ek wil nie bang wees omdat 'n mens foute gemaak het en menslike swakhede het nie. Ek kan nie toelaat dat dit my beïnvloed nie. En dis hoekom baie mense my kritiseer.'

Ek probeer om nie te vra 'Hoekom ek?' wanneer ek dink aan Nelson Mandela se besluit om my te kies nie. Ek dink eerder aan die aanhalings hierbo. In die meer as negentien jaar wat ons saam gewerk het, het hy my swakhede leer ken, en so ook my sterk punte, en hy het in my sterk punte belê om van my die mens te maak wat ek vandag is.

Ek het amper twintig jaar vir hom gewerk en was sy persoonlike assistent tot sy dood op 5 Desember 2013. Ek het in 2009 besluit om hierdie boek as huldeblyk aan hom te begin skryf. Ek wou hoofsaaklik my ervarings opteken in die hoop dat ander deur my storie geraak en verander sal word. My boek is 'n eerbetoon aan Khulu, soos ek hom geken het.

Dis nie sy storie nie. Dis my storie, en daarmee is ek tevrede. Maar lesers sal dalk teleurgesteld wees as hulle sensasie in hierdie boek verwag. Ek gaan nie die vertroue wat Nelson Mandela in my gestel het, minag nie. Sy vertroue is die grootste eer wat my te beurt geval

het en ek wil dit vir die res van my lewe met liefde bewaar. Wat ek besluit het om te skryf, en wat ek besluit het om weg te laat, wat hom aanbetref, berus op daardie vertroue. Hierdie is nie ’n boek waarin ek alles probeer sê wat daar te sê is nie.

Dis ook nie ’n boek met groot politieke insigte of ’n ontleding van sy lewe nie. Dis ’n eenvoudige storie van my ervarings saam met hom. Een van die belangrikste lesse wat ek deur die jare by hierdie groot man geleer het, en wat sy vrou, Graça Machel, later sou versterk, is dat jy net aan een mens rekenskap moet gee, en dis aan jouself. Jy moet saans bed toe kan gaan met jou eie gedagtes en gewete, en ná die skryf van hierdie boek moet ek die troos van ’n skoon gewete as kussing kan gebruik. Ek het die behoefte om hom trots te maak, want al was daar soveel negatiwiteit en verwarring in die laaste paar jaar van ons tyd saam, is daar ’n mooi storie om te vertel, en ek is deel van daardie storie, en dis my plig om dit met ander te deel. Die belangrikste vir my is dat ek in my hart moet weet dat hy, as hy die boek kon lees, tevrede sou wees met dit wat ek daarin sê en dat hy sou saamstem met die feite. Nadat ek sestien van die afgelope negentien jaar dagin en daguit saam met hom deurgebring het, weet ek waarmee hy gemaklik sou wees en waarmee nie, en dit is wat ek moet beskerm.

Die boek is dus ’n versameling staaltjies, soms ten koste van my, oor ’n tyd waarin daar so baie gebeur het. Geen berou nie, net lesse te leer. Emosioneel is ek skatryk, en al gebeur daar verder niks buitengewoon met my nie, sal my herinneringe vir my genoeg wees. Ek het ’n vol lewe gehad. Die meeste mense sal nooit ervaar wat ek ervaar het nie, en my storie is een van verandering, van ’n lewensbeskouing en manier van dink wat stadig omswaai tot op die plek waar ek my nou bevind. Lesers moet besluit of hulle met enige deel hiervan kan identifiseer en of hulle lesse uit my storie kan leer. Dit kan ek nie namens hulle doen nie.

Dit sou ook verkeerd wees om te aanvaar dat ek die enigste een, of selfs iemand uitsonderliks, by Madiba was. Ek het ’n spesifieke rol in sy lewe gespeel, wat hoofsaaklik met sy openbare lewe te doen gehad het. Maar daar was ook baie ander – huishoudelike personeel, kantoorpersoneel, veiligheidsmense en mediese personeel – wat net so ’n belangrike rol in sy lewe gespeel het soos ek, en van wie hy ewe afhanklik was. Party van hulle is by my storie ingesluit, maar ek kon

eenvoudig nie aan elkeen hulde bring nie.

Ek het my bes probeer, en dis al wat ek het om te gee. Ek hoop ek kan ’n klein bydrae tot Nelson Mandela se nalatenskap lewer deur my voorregte en ervarings te deel met enigeen wat oop is daarvoor. As ek een lewe verander deur iemand te raak met my storie, het ek my plig gedoen.

Ek sal ewig dankbaar en verskuldig bly …

Prologue: Zeldina

It was early 2000s. I was in my thirties. I stood outside our office door in Johannesburg, as usual, awaiting the arrival of Nelson Mandela to receive him, escort him into his office and brief him on events for the day. Whenever his car appeared around the corner, my face lit up, no matter how much pressure I was under. The smile that painted my face was one loaded with love and admiration, like one would have when you see your dearest grandparents. His car came to a standstill and the bodyguards emerged. We greeted and briefly exchanged pleasantries before they opened the heavily armed car door for Madiba to step out of the car. Madiba is Nelson Mandela's clan name in South Africa. It is also the term with which people endearingly refer to him. Some call him Tata, which means 'Father', but most people refer to him and address him as Madiba. I called him Khulu, an abbreviated version of Tata um'khulu which means 'Grandfather'.

While getting out of the car, our eyes met. I exclaimed, 'Good morning Khulu.' He called me Zeldina. He was handed his walking stick to support himself to get out of the car. The stick was made from ivory, a gift from his good friend Douw Steyn. He didn't care much for material things but his walking stick was one of the few items he valued and protected with his life.

'Good morning Zeldina,' he said as he emerged from the car. His face lit up with his usual smile although I detected some reserve. Once the bodyguards had him steady on his feet, they handed him to me. He would support himself on his walking stick and hold onto my arm with his left hand.

'How are you this morning Khulu?' I asked.

'I'm fine Zeldina,' he said but he didn't continue as he usually did, asking after my well-being. That was another sign that something bothered him. As we walked into his office I thought of giving him a

few moments to gather his thoughts before I started overloading him with information about the day. Once his office door was closed he opened up:

‘You know Zeldina, I had a dream last night.’

I responded with a ‘Yes?’

‘I dreamt that you left me, that you deserted me . . .’ he said.

I was dumbstruck. Me? Zelda la Grange? Abandoning Nelson Mandela? How could he ever conceive me doing something like that? At the time I had been in his service for almost ten years. What would cause him to feel that I would abandon him? To the contrary, because of my early childhood I was the one who feared abandonment. I had to set his mind at ease. I put my left hand on his left hand which was holding onto my right arm and said, ‘Khulu, I would never ever do something like that and you should please never think about that ever again. I can give you my assurance that I will never abandon you.’ And then added on a lighter note, ‘In any event I think you are going to abandon me or chase me away before I can abandon you.’

He looked at me, laughed half heartedly, lifted his eyebrows and then responded: ‘I will never do that.’

That was the warmth of our relationship. We needed affirmation from each other. We looked after each other. I have grown to love this man who was once my people’s enemy. He resembled fear in our eyes. Growing up in apartheid South Africa as a white Afrikaner, we had spent our lives oppressing the same people that Nelson Mandela represented. He was the voice of the oppressed and the liberation struggle. Less than fifteen years after his release from prison, here I was trying to explain and defend my commitment to the man we once despised.

Apartheid was the system introduced by the white government in South Africa in the 1940s. It advocated for white supremacy and black oppression and was a clear set of legislation providing for the separation and segregation of white and black in South Africa. The laws of apartheid were upheld in churches and schools, on beaches and in restaurants, and any areas where the white minority could feel intimidated by the presence of black people.

Yet I walked next to Nelson Mandela for most of my adult professional life – each of us holding onto the other. I was a young Afrikaner girl whose views and mindset were changed by the greatest statesman of our time. Yet to me, he was more than my moral conscience. I had learned to care for him, because he cared for me. He

shaped and changed my thinking because for him to employ a white Afrikaans-speaking young woman as his Personal Assistant was not only unprecedented, it was unheard of.

Voorwoord: Zeldina

Dit was vroeg in die dekade 2000. Ek was in my dertigs. Ek het soos gewoonlik buite ons kantoordeur in Johannesburg gestaan en wag vir Nelson Mandela se aankoms, sodat ek saam met hom na sy kantoor kon stap en met hom oor die dag se gebeure kon praat. Wanneer sy motor om die draai gekom het, het dit my altyd opgekikker, al was ek ook onder hóéveel druk. My glimlag was vol liefde en bewondering, soos jy sou voel wanneer jy jou geliefde ouma en oupa weer na ’n lang tyd sien. Sy motor het stilgehou en sy lyfwagte het nader gestaan. Ons het gou gegroet en grappies gemaak voor hulle die swaargepantserde motordeur oopmaak sodat Madiba kon uitklim. Madiba is Nelson Mandela se stamnaam in Suid-Afrika. Dit is ook hoe mense met deernis van hom praat. Party mense noem hom Tata, wat ‘vader’ beteken, maar die meeste praat van hom en met hom as Madiba. Ek het hom Khulu genoem, ’n verkorte weergawe van Tata um’khulu, wat ‘grootvader’ beteken.

Ons het oogkontak gemaak. ‘Goeiemôre, Khulu!’ het ek uitgeroep. Hy het my Zeldina genoem. Iemand het sy kierie vir hom aangegee sodat hy daarop kon steun terwyl hy uit die motor klim. Dit was ’n ivoorkierie, ’n geskenk van sy goeie vriend Douw Steyn. Hy het hom nie veel aan wêreldsgoed gesteur nie, maar die kierie was een van min dinge wat vir hom belangrik was en wat hy tot aan die einde van sy lewe bewaar het.

‘Goeiemôre, Zeldina,’ het hy gesê toe hy uit die motor klim. Hy het soos altyd ’n glimlag op sy gesig gehad, maar ek het gesien iets hinder hom. Nadat sy lyfwagte seker was hy staan vas op sy voete, het hulle hom aan my oorgegee. Hy sou op sy kierie leun en met sy linkerhand aan my arm vashou.

‘Hoe gaan dit vanoggend, Khulu?’ het ek gevra.

‘Goed dankie, Zeldina,’ het hy geantwoord, maar nie soos gewoonlik oor my uitgevra nie. Dit was nog ’n teken dat iets hom pla. Op pad na sy kantoor het ek besluit om hom ’n paar oomblikke te gee om sy gedagtes agtermekaar te kry voordat ek hom met die dag se dinge oorlaai. Toe sy kantoordeur agter ons toe was, het hy sy hart oopgemaak.

‘Weet jy, Zeldina, ek het gisteraand ’n droom gehad.’

‘Ja?’ het ek geantwoord.

‘Ek het gedroom jy het my verlaat, in die steek gelaat …’ het hy gesê.

Ek was stomgeslaan. Ek? Zelda la Grange? Nelson Mandela verlaat? Hoe kon hy hom vir ’n oomblik verbeel ek sou so iets doen? Ek het toe reeds tien jaar vir hom gewerk. Wat sou hom laat dink ek sou hom in die steek laat? Trouens, as gevolg van my kinderjare was ek die een wat bang was ek word op my eie gelaat. Ek moes hom gerusstel. Ek het my linkerhand op sy linkerhand, wat op my regterhand gerus het, geplaas en gesê: ‘Khulu, ek sal nooit, ooit so iets doen nie. Moet asseblief nie weer daaraan dink nie. Ek belowe, ek sal u nooit versaak nie.’ En toe voeg ek by, op ligter trant: ‘Ek dink in elk geval u sal my uitskop voor ek so iets kan doen.’

Hy het na my gekyk, halfhartig gelag, sy wenkbroue gelig en geantwoord: ‘Ek sal dít nooit doen nie.’

Dis hoe hartlik ons verhouding was. Ons moes mekaar gerusstel. Ons het na mekaar omgesien. Ek het lief geword vir hierdie man wat eens op ’n tyd die vyand van my mense was. Daar was vrees vir hom in ons oë. In my grootwordjare in Suid-Afrika onder apartheid het ons ons lewe daaraan gewy om die mense wat Nelson Mandela verteenwoordig het, te onderdruk. Hy was die stem van die onderdruktes en die vryheidstryd. Minder as vyftien jaar ná sy vrylating uit die tronk het ek hier gestaan om my lojaliteit te bevestig aan die man wat ons in die verlede gehaat het.

Apartheid was die stelsel wat die wit regering in die 1940’s in Suid-Afrika geskep het. Dit was gegrond op wit oorheersing en die onderdrukking van swart mense, met wette wat wit en swart weg van mekaar gehou het. Die wette is selfs in kerke en klaskamers toegepas;

op strande en in restaurante en enige plek waar die wit minderheid bedreig kon voel as daar swart mense was.

Tog het ek vir die grootste deel van my beroepslewe langs Nelson Mandela gestap, met die een wat aan die ander vashou. Ek was ’n jong Afrikanermeisie wie se mening en uitkyk op die lewe deur die grootste staatsman van ons tyd verander is. En tog was hy vir my meer as my morele gewete. Ek het geleer om vir hom om te gee, omdat hy vir my omgegee het. Hy het my manier van dink verander en gevorm, want vir hom om ’n jong wit Afrikaanssprekende vrou as sy persoonlike assistent aan te stel, was nie net ongekend nie, maar ook ongehoord.

PART ONE

‘If it isn’t good, let it die’

1970–1994

1
Childhood

On 29 October 1970 in Boksburg to the east of Johannesburg, South Africa, I was born and not left to die but to make it good, like most babies that are brought into this world.

On the same day, Nelson Mandela was already beginning his ninth year in prison. In prison since 1962, and then convicted for treason after the Rivonia Trial in 1964, he was sentenced to life imprisonment. He and other political prisoners were incarcerated on Robben Island, a desolate island off the coast of Cape Town, for opposing apartheid.

At the time my father worked at a construction company and my mother was a teacher. They were very poor. My only sibling, my brother Anton, was three years old when I was born. Because our parents were white, we were born to legal privilege. That was the way it was in South Africa in 1970. Even though my parents' families shared the same holiday destination every December, my parents only met in Boksburg once my mother was studying to become a teacher and my father was working in the postal service.

My grandfather's family originated from French Huguenots who fled the south of France during the 1680s to escape the persecution of Protestants by the Catholic authorities. The La Grange family originated from a small town called Cabrières in the region of Avignon; a place I discovered and visited twice in the decades after my birth as a result of working for Nelson Mandela.

My father was one of two siblings. Their parents lived in Mosselbay, a coastal town along the picturesque Garden Route in the Cape Province. My grandmother's sister was the first qualified female pharmacist in South Africa and up to this day the Scholtz family own

and run a reputable pharmacy in the town of Willowmore in the Eastern Cape. She was therefore quite an impressive woman and someone we automatically looked up to as a result of her unique achievement.

I was also very fond of my dad's father. His name was Anthony Michael but we just called him 'Oupa Mike' (Grandpa Mike). He used to visit us a few times a year and then stay with us for a few weeks. He smoked a pipe and the smell of smoke irritated us. He would sit on one particular chair and constantly wipe his hand on the arm rest. His skin was old and cracked and the tobacco from stuffing his pipe stuck in those cracks. When he left our home the armrest was black, much to my mother's irritation, but nobody ever said he couldn't smoke in the house.

My mother was the eldest of three siblings from the Strydom family. The only famous family with that surname was that of J. G. Strijdom (also sometimes spelt Strydom), the sixth Prime Minister of South Africa who served between 1954 and 1958. He was succeeded by the 'Father of Apartheid', H. F. Verwoerd. When I learned as a child about a Strijdom being Prime Minister, I convinced myself that we were somehow related even though no real connection exists.

My mother's father died in a motorcycle accident when my mother was only twelve years of age. I often asked my mother whether she recalled the night they received the news about her father's death. She has mostly avoided talking about it, but has said that she recalled been woken up by someone knocking on their front door and then hearing my grandmother crying hysterically.

My grandmother had few options about the upbringing of her children. She had a clerical job at the South African Railways and it was financially impossible for her to raise three small children by herself.

She decided to send my mother, being the eldest, to an orphanage. The children's home was in Cape Town, which is why my mother still detests the city. For her, it stinks of abandonment.

Ma only saw her siblings and my grandmother once a year during the December holidays. Both the La Grange and Strydom families camped in the same area close to Mosselbay, called Hartenbos, during the December holidays, but they never knew about the other's existence.

My mother's childhood memories are limited to suffering, neglect, sadness. The world was suffering the consequences of the Second

World War, slowly recovering from the economic recession, and my mother, even as an Afrikaans child in the 1940s in South Africa, felt those consequences through poverty. I greatly admire her for not holding a grudge against my grandmother, whatever the circumstances.

Grandma Tilly, my mother's mother, was part of our everyday life, even though she had given up my mother as a child. She lived close to us and I would often visit her on my way from primary school, as she conveniently lived halfway between our house and the school. Before she moved closer to us, Grandma Tilly lived opposite the Union Buildings. Sitting on the hill overlooking the city of Pretoria, the administrative capital of South Africa, the Union Buildings were built by Herbert Baker and were the seat of the apartheid government. Imposing, monumental and beautiful – for my family, it was like living across from the White House.

On Sundays the La Granges and the Strydoms, my uncle's family, would all visit my gran in her apartment for lunch and then go for a walk on the manicured lawns of the Union Buildings. The Union Buildings represented ultimate authority and we walked up the steps with great respect. My cousins, brother and I would play on the grounds, rolling down the sloping lawn, laughing all the time. We were happy children growing up in apartheid South Africa.

Ours was a typical privileged white family, benefiting from apartheid through good education, access to basic services and a sense of entitlement to the land and its resources. Apartheid was our regime's political solution to enforce segregation and the separation of races, classes and cultures.

Instituted by the Afrikaner leaders in the late 1950s, the then State President, Hendrik Verwoerd, called it 'policy'. 'Our policy is one of good neighbourliness', implying that the Afrikaner cared for all racial groups in South Africa. But the reality was that apartheid was a way of ensuring that Afrikaners benefited from the economy, opportunities and wealth of the country's natural resources, at the expense of others.

By the mid 1970s the apartheid government had created a racist state based on decisions taken in the Union Buildings. Black and white people were separated, not allowed to marry, befriend, have sex together or to live in the same cities. These were the so-called Group Areas Act provisions in South Africa, an attempt to prevent people from freely moving around and living lives within the same boundaries. Black people couldn't ride in the same buses or swim in

the same sea as whites. Due to its apartheid policies, South Africa was suspended from participating in the business of the United Nations in 1974, and followed by a resolution passed in 1977 a mandatory arms embargo was imposed against us. However, the United States, Britain and France opposed the expulsion of South Africa from the UN despite several resolutions calling for it.

Even though my country was an international pariah, we kept on playing and laughing at the seat of government. This was because my people were protected. Protected from men like Nelson Mandela. It was people like him – black and determined to overthrow the government, challenging white superiority – who we feared.

Neither of my parents were politicians or worked for the government. But we supported the regime. We were, I suppose, racists. We epitomized the typical Afrikaner middle-class family at the time: law-abiding citizens, cheerleaders for whatever the church and government dictated. Our respect for authority and the ties to the Dutch Reformed Church superseded common sense. Like any other Afrikaans family, we attended church services on Sunday morning without fail and participated in all related activities to exhibit our model citizenry.

So apartheid was in our home. We lived by segregation. It was all acceptable and unquestionable, not only because the Nationalist Party government in power dictated it but also because our church endorsed it.

Black people were anyone who wasn't white. Coloured and Indian people were black in our eyes too. 'Coloured people', now referred to as 'brown' people, originated from different groups, just like the Afrikaners, but some of their forefathers were Qash-skinned. Therefore they were regarded as 'black' in South Africa.

The white Afrikaner has a mixed genealogy that includes Dutch, French, German and British blood. Although unthinkable at the time, it has emerged in modern history and studies that almost all white Afrikaner people have DNA that can be traced to black and brown ancestry in South Africa – facts not all white Afrikaners easily accept.

At the time of apartheid you didn't even contemplate anything but simply did it. I knew that all black people were required to carry a pass book and they had to show their pass books randomly to police that stopped them. I didn't know that they were only allowed to move in areas that their passes allowed them to move in, and if they didn't have a pass for a specific area they would be arrested for transgression

of the pass act and thrown into jail, before being deported to their own area. If you had a pass for Johannesburg, you couldn't move in Pretoria – two cities barely thirty miles apart. It was the government's way of controlling black people's movements.

According to our church, we were right. We did the 'right' thing. And yes it was right, as in direction to the right. The utmost conservatism.

Like most white families we had a black live-in domestic worker. Her name was Jogabeth. Reminiscing about those days one cannot help but come to the realization that most white children of my age were brought up by black people. They were not only domestic workers but surrogate mothers. As a child Jogabeth was part of our family to a certain extent, and within limits – apartheid limits. She stayed in a back room. She had a toilet but no bath or shower. She had a separate cup and cutlery and was not allowed to use 'ours'. I cannot recall that my parents ever told her she was not allowed to use anything of ours but she knew and we knew. It was unspoken. Yet, Jogabeth was my lifeline.

Touching a black person was taboo. Apart from the fact that white people were considered superior to black people, we were brought up to believe that they were not as clean as we were, they apparently smelled different and the texture of their hair was different to ours. You would never dream of touching a black person's hair or face. It was just unthinkable. Yet Jogabeth carried me on her back when I was a toddler. Although I never would have touched her hair, her hands, arms and her bosom comforted me whenever I needed it. Because she brought us children up, in our eyes she wasn't as black as other blacks. She posed no threat to us and she served us and therefore she was more acceptable to us than other black people.

I remember on many occasions being bullied by my brother and how Jogabeth had to comfort me after losing the battle. She was my safe house and I knew that, as long as I was in her care, I was protected from my big brother's bullying. And then during such times, I found comfort in her arms, close to her chest.

* * *

When I was twelve years old and my father was employed by the South African Breweries, eventually working his way up to become logistics manager, political unrest against apartheid played a role in

my life for the first time. The head offices of the SAB were situated in the Poyntons Building in Church Street, Pretoria. On Friday, 20 May 1983 my dad was scheduled to fly to Cape Town to attend to business there. Just before 4 p.m. a bomb blast shook the entire city of Pretoria in its core. The story broke on the news immediately and it was reported that the car bomb exploded right in front of the Poyntons Building.

When news was received my mother called my dad's office, but there was no response. She called the airport to check whether he was on the flight at around 6 p.m. but the airport authorities refused to release information on passengers, as they always do. We couldn't find anyone that could confirm whether my dad was still in the building at the time of the explosion, whether he had safely left by the time of the explosion or whether he possibly walked past or drove out of the parking garage at the time of the explosion. He often attended business luncheons at restaurants in the surrounding areas of his head office and we feared for the worst. It was only at about 9 p.m. that night, when he arrived at his hotel in Cape Town, that he called to inform us that he was safe. It was the longest five hours of my life. We were relieved that he was unharmed. I didn't ask why resistance to apartheid would be so strong, or take such violent forms. The violence only served to strengthen my belief in apartheid, the inherent difference between black and white.

Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the opposition African National Congress's military wing, accepted responsibility for the bomb in which 19 people were killed – 8 black people and 11 white people – and more than 217 were injured. The Church Street bomb exploded at the height of rush hour. The two men involved in planning and executing the bombing were also killed, as the bomb was detonated by accident too soon.

Umkhonto we Sizwe, 'Spear of the Nation', was established in 1961 after Nelson Mandela and other founding members of MK decided that violence in South Africa was becoming the only way to respond to the violence exercised by the apartheid government. Since the government resorted to violent means in fighting the ANC and keeping black people oppressed under apartheid laws, MK was the ANC's response to such violence. In Nelson Mandela's speech during the closing moments of the Rivonia Trial in 1964, when he was charged with acts of terrorism and after which he and others were sentenced to life imprisonment, he noted about MK: 'It would be

unrealistic and wrong for African leaders to continue preaching peace and non-violence at a time when the government met our peaceful demands with force.'

Having gone to Ethiopia and Morocco in 1962 to receive military training and to secure support for MK, Mr Mandela was prepared to resort to violence. However, I am not sure whether he knew while he was imprisoned what ANC cadres were doing outside and whether those imprisoned were consulted about such acts of violence. In 1983 Oliver Tambo was President of the ANC; Nelson Mandela was already sixty-five years of age, spending his twentieth year imprisoned, and communication was difficult with prisoners. I subsequently asked him whether he was aware of the Church Street bombing and he said that they had been briefed after the incident.

The ANC knew it needed to force the hand of the racist regime. To do that they would have to turn to violence. The government was not prepared to abolish apartheid or improve the living conditions of black people and they would rather fight the black force with violence. The ANC's response was violence. They did that by targeting strategic installations, crucial to the state. The Poytons Building was strategic because the South African Air Force Headquarters was situated in the same building.

I was generally oblivious to what was happening in the country, the poverty of blacks and the violence, but I knew that we lived in separate cocoons and that we were fighting one another in a bitter battle because we were not able to co-exist. It was pressed upon us instinctively, because of the way we lived, that when approached by a black person, you turned and walked the other way. You didn't make conversation and you feared them. They were not our friends. I was quite happy with my life as it was and knew that we were locking doors and windows from an early age out of fear that black people might attack us at night. It never crossed my mind that we could be harmed by white people too. It was always 'black' people. I didn't ask why they might attack us, or who they were, or what their lives were like. I only knew that they were dangerous.

On Sundays we solemnly prayed in church for the men defending our borders. It was the right thing to do because everybody else did it. Well, all the other whites in my community. I didn't know which border but I knew they were fighting black people. My knowledge was limited to whites protecting the border from infiltration by more black people. How strange that then one didn't ask the question, which

black people? Were we protecting our borders from infiltration by more black people or were we protecting our borders from other military forces in the region infiltrating South Africa to support the ANC? You were told just this: we are fighting black communist people. I was brought up to believe that all black people were communists and atheists. Yet on Sundays black people gathered in small groups in open spaces, holding church services. I disregarded seeing that and cannot remember that the contradiction to what I was brought up to believe ever bothered me. As a child it is easy to follow when you grow up in an environment that is safe. Perhaps if I had been oppressed, didn't have access to a decent school, a proper house, electricity and water, I would have asked different questions, and my brain would have developed into being more inquisitive about injustice at an early age. In any case it didn't.

Today I also realize that the community you are brought up in chooses to live in a particular way. The people around you, grown-up adult people, decide what is socially acceptable and what is not. You live that life not realizing that there is a life beyond: issues, policies, world events and tendencies that influence your world. When you live in comfort you don't ask questions, and there was no need for me to question what was happening beyond the walls of our house. No person is born a racist. You become a racist by influences around you. And I had become a racist by the time I was thirteen years old. By that calculation I should never have become Nelson Mandela's longest-serving assistant. But I did.

DEEL EEN

'As dit nie goed is nie, laat dit sterf'

1970–1994

1

Kinderjare

Ek is op 29 Oktober 1970 in Boksburg, oos van Johannesburg, gebore en ek is nie gelos om te sterf nie, maar om iets goeds van my lewe te maak, soos die meeste babas wat die wêreld binnekom.

Op daardie dag was Nelson Mandela al besig om sy negende jaar agter tralies uit te dien. Hy was in aanhouding sedert 1962 en is ná die Rivonia-verhoor in 1964 aan hoogverraad skuldig bevind en lewenslank tronk toe gestuur. Hy en ander politieke gevangenes is op Robbeneiland aangehou omdat hulle hulle teen apartheid verset het.

In daardie dae het my pa by ’n konstruksiemaatskappy gewerk en my ma het onderwys gegee. Ons was baie arm. My broer, Anton, was drie toe ek gebore is. Omdat my ouers wit was, het ons voordele onder die apartheidswette geniet. Dit was hoe dit in 1970 gewerk het. My ouers se gesinne het elke Desember op dieselfde plek vakansie gehou, maar my pa en ma het mekaar eers in Boksburg ontmoet toe sy met haar onderwysstudies besig was en hy vir die posdiens gewerk het.

My oupa La Grange se familie was afstammelinge van die Franse Hugenote, wat in die 1680’s uit die suide van Frankryk gevlug het voor die Katolieke se vervolging van Protestante. Die La Grange-familie kom van ’n klein dorpie met die naam Cabrières in die Avignon-streek; ’n plek wat ek ontdek en twee keer besoek het weens Nelson Mandela se invloed op my lewe.

My pa was een van twee kinders. Sy ouers het in Mosselbaai gebly, ’n kusdorp langs die pragtige Tuinroete in die Kaap. My ouma se suster was die eerste vrou in Suid-Afrika wat haar as apteker gekwalifiseer het en tot vandag toe besit en bestuur die Scholtz-familie ’n bekende apteek in Willowmore in die Oos-Kaap. Mense het respek vir haar gehad. Haar uitsonderlike prestasie het beteken dat ons ook agting vir haar gehad het.

Ek het ook ’n sagte plekkie vir my pa se pa gehad. Sy naam was Anthony Michael, maar ons het hom sommer oupa Mike genoem. Hy het elke jaar ’n paar keer by ons kom kuier en dan weke lank gebly. Hy het pyp gerook en die reuk van die rook het ons gepla. Hy sou altyd op dieselfde stoel sit en aanhoudend sy hand teen een van die armleunings afvee. Sy vel was oud en gekraak en die tabak waarmee hy sy pyp gestop het, het in die krake vasgesit. Teen die tyd dat hy huis toe gaan was die armleuning swart, wat my ma vies gemaak het, maar niemand het gesê hy mag nie in die huis rook nie.

My ma was die oudste van drie kinders in die Strydom-gesin. Die enigste beroemde familie met daardie naam was dié van J.G. Strijdom (ook soms Strydom gespel), die sesde eerste minister van Suid-Afrika, wat van 1954 tot 1958 in dié amp gedien het. Hy is opgevolg deur die ‘vader van apartheid’, H.F. Verwoerd. Toe ek as kind gehoor het van ’n Strydom wat eerste minister was, het ek myself oortuig ons is familie, al het daar geen waarheid in gesteek nie.

My ma se pa is in ’n motorfietsongeluk dood toe sy net twaalf jaar oud was. Ek het my ma gereeld gevra of sy die aand onthou toe hulle gehoor het haar pa is dood. Sy wou gewoonlik nie daaroor praat nie, maar sy het wel gesê sy onthou dat ’n klop aan die voordeur haar wakker gemaak het, waarna my ouma histeries begin huil het.

Daar was vir my ouma nie veel van ’n keuse oor die manier waarop sy haar kinders kon grootmaak nie. Sy het as klerk vir die Suid-Afrikaanse Spoorweë gewerk en sy kon dit nie bekostig om drie kinders alleen te versorg nie.

Sy het besluit om my ma, die oudste, na ’n kinderhuis toe te stuur. Die kinderhuis was in Kaapstad, en tot vandag toe verpes my ma dié stad. Vir haar hang die reuk van verwerping daar in die lug.

Ma het my ouma en die ander kinders net een keer per jaar, in die Desembervakansie, gesien. Die La Grange- en Strydom-gesinne het elke Desembermaand op Hartenbos kampeer, maar nie van mekaar geweet nie.

My ma se herinneringe aan haar kinderjare bestaan net uit lyding, verwaarlosing en hartseer. Die wêreld het gely as gevolg van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog en die ekonomie het baie lank gevat om reg te kom, en my ma, selfs as Afrikanerkind in die 1940’s in Suid-Afrika, het die armoede aan haar lyf gevoel. Ek bewonder haar omdat sy

nooit my ouma verwyt het nie, al het wat ook al gebeur.

Ouma Tilly, my ma se ma, was deel van ons huislewe, al het sy my ma as kind weggestuur. Sy het naby ons gebly en op laerskool het ek in die middae by haar gaan kuier, want haar huis was gerieflik halfpad tussen ons huis en die skool. Voor sy naby ons ingetrek het, het ouma Tilly oorkant die Uniegebou gebly. Op ’n koppie wat oor Pretoria, die administratiewe hoofstad van Suid-Afrika, uitkyk, is die Uniegebou, wat deur sir Herbert Baker ontwerp is. Dit was die hoofkwartier van die apartheidsregering: indrukwekkend, reusagtig en mooi. Vir my familie was dit soos om oorkant die Withuis te bly.

Op Sondae het die La Granges en die Strydoms, my oom se gesin, almal by my ouma se woonstel bymekaargekom vir middagete en daarna op die netjiese grasperke van die Uniegebou gaan stap. Die Uniegebou was die plek waar die land se leiers hulle werk gedoen het, en ons het met respek teen die trappe opgeklim. Ek en my broer en my niggies het op die terrein gespeel, teen die skuinste van die grasperk afgerol terwyl ons aanmekaar lag. Ons was gelukkige kinders in Suid-Afrika se apartheidsjare.

Ons het die tipiese voorregte van ’n wit familie geniet deur goeie onderwys, toegang tot water, elektrisiteit en hospitale en ’n gevoel dat die land en alles wat hy bied ons s’n was. Apartheid was ons regering se politieke manier om rasse, klasse en kulture uitmekaar te hou.

Dit is vanaf 1948 toegepas, maar het eers die naam gekry toe die destydse eerste minister, Hendrik Verwoerd, dit in die laat 1950’s as ‘beleid’ beskryf het. ‘Ons beleid is een van goeie buurmanskap,’ wat dit laat klink asof die Afrikaner besorg was oor die belange van al die rasse in Suid-Afrika. Maar die waarheid is dat apartheid ’n manier was om Afrikaners te bevoordeel wat die ekonomie, geleenthede en die land se natuurlike rykdom betref, ten koste van ander.

Teen die middel van die 1970’s het die regering ’n rassistiese staat geskep met besluite wat in dié gebou geneem is. Swart en wit is geskei en verbied om met mekaar te trou, seks te hê en vriende te wees, en soms om in dieselfde stede te bly. Die Groepsgebiedewet het dit voorgeskryf, om te keer dat mense vrylik beweeg of in stede met dieselfde grense woon. Swart mense is verbied om in dieselfde busse as wit mense te ry en om dieselfde strande te gebruik. As gevolg van

Suid-Afrika se apartheidsbeleid is die land se deelname aan die werk van die Verenigde Nasies in 1974 stopgesit, en in 1977 is ander lande verbied om wapens aan Suid-Afrika te verkoop. Baie lande wou gehad het Suid-Afrika moes heeltemal uit die Verenigde Nasies geskop word, maar die Verenigde State, Frankryk en Brittanje het gekeer dat dit gebeur.

Al het die wêreld van my land 'n muishond gemaak, kon ons nog steeds voor die Uniegebou lag en speel. Dit was so omdat my mense beskerm is. Beskerm teen mense soos Nelson Mandela. Dit was vir mense soos hy – swart en vasbeslote om die regering omver te werp en 'n einde te maak aan wit oorheersing – wat ons bang was.

Nie een van my ouers was by politiek betrokke nie, maar ons het die regering ondersteun. 'n Mens sou seker kon sê ons was rassiste. Ons was 'n tipiese middelklas-Afrikanergesin: wetsgehoorsame burgers wat reguit gesê het ons ondersteun alles wat die kerk en die regering sê. Ons respek vir gesag en ons bande met die NG Kerk het gemaak dat ons nie selfstandig kon dink nie. Soos elke ander Afrikanergesin was ons elke Sondag in die kerk en het ons aan kerkaktiwiteite deelgeneem om ons voorbeeldige burgerskap te bewys.

Apartheid was dus in ons huis. Ons het die skeidingsreëls nagekom, nie net omdat die regering gesê het ons moet nie, maar ook omdat ons kerk dit goedgekeur het.

Almal wat nie wit was nie, is as swart mense beskou. Bruin mense en Indiërs was in ons oë ook swart. Bruin mense is uit baie verskillende groepe afkomstig, net soos die Afrikaners, maar party van hulle voorsate het donker velle gehad. Daarom was hulle 'swart' in Suid-Afrika. Daar was ook Indiërs wat oor baie jare heen na Suid-Afrika toe geïmmigreer het. Kragtens wet was al hierdie mense ons mindere. Alles in die land is deur ras bepaal.

Die wit Afrikaner is van gemengde afkoms wat Hollandse, Franse, Duitse en Engelse bloed insluit. Al was dit destyds ondenkbaar, het meer onlangse navorsing bewys dat feitlik alle Afrikaners se DNS ook op 'n swart en bruin invloed dui – feite wat nie alle Afrikaners ewe maklik aanvaar nie.

In die tyd van apartheid het jy oor niks nagedink nie, maar net gedoen wat jy aangesê is. Ek het geweet dat daar van alle swart mense verwag is om altyd 'n pasboek te dra, en dat die polisie hulle kon

voorkeer wanneer hulle ook al wou en daarvoor vra. Ek het nie geweet dat hulle net in gebiede toegelaat is wat in die pasboek staan nie, en dat hulle in die tronk gegooi kon word as hulle dié reëls verontagsaam. Daarna is hulle na hul 'eie' gebiede weggestuur. As jy 'n pas vir Johannesburg gehad het, was jy byvoorbeeld nie in Pretoria – minder as vyftig kilometer weg – welkom nie. Dit was die regering se manier om swart mense se bewegings in te perk.

Volgens ons kerk was ons reg. Ons het gedoen wat 'reg' is. En ja, nie net 'reg' nie, maar ook 'regs', so konserwatief as wat 'n mens kan dink.

Soos die meeste wit gesinne het ons 'n swart huishulp gehad wat op die werf gewoon het. Haar naam was Jogabeth. Wanneer 'n mens terugdink aan daardie dae, kan jy nie anders nie as om te besef dat die meeste wit kinders van my ouderdom deur swart mense grootgemaak is. Hulle was nie net huiswerkers nie, maar het ook vir baie ma's ingestaan. In my kinderdae was Jogabeth tot 'n sekere mate en binne perke deel van ons gesin – die perke wat deur apartheid gestel is. Sy het in 'n agterkamer gewoon. Sy het haar eie toilet gehad, maar nie 'n bad of stort nie. Sy het haar eie koppie en eetgerei gehad en is nie toegelaat om 'ons s'n' te gebruik nie. Ek kon nie onthou dat my ouers haar ooit verbied het om ons s'n te gebruik nie, maar sy het geweet en ons het geweet. Dit was nie nodig dat enigeen dit sê nie. En tog was Jogabeth my redder.

Om aan 'n swart mens te raak, was taboe. Nie net was wit mense veronderstel om beter te wees nie, ons is ook grootgemaak om te glo swart mense is nie so skoon soos ons nie. Hulle hare was 'n ander tekstuur en ons het geglo hulle ruik ook anders. Jy sou nie daarvan droom om aan 'n swart mens se gesig of hare te vat nie. Dit was ondenkbaar. En tog het Jogabeth my op haar rug ge-abba toe ek 'n kleuter was. Al sou ek nooit aan haar hare vat nie, het haar hande, arms en boesem my vertroos wanneer ek dit nodig gehad het. Omdat sy ons grootgemaak het, was sy in ons oë nie so swart soos ander swart mense nie. Sy was geen bedreiging vir ons nie. Sy was in ons diens, en daarom was sy vir ons meer aanvaarbaar as ander swart mense.

Ek onthou baie kere wat sy my kom troos het nadat my broer my afgeknou het. Sy was vir my 'n veilige hawe en ek het geweet, solank as wat ek in haar toesig was, was ek selfs teen my ouboet se afknouery

bestand. In sulke tye het ek vertroosting in haar arms, teen haar bors gevind.

Politieke onrus het die eerste keer 'n rol in my lewe gespeel toe ek twaalf jaar oud was. My pa was in diens van die Suid-Afrikaanse Brouerye, waar hy sy pad opgewerk het na 'n pos as logistieke bestuurder. SAB se hoofkantoor was in die Poyntonsgebou in Kerkstraat, Pretoria. Op Vrydag, 20 Mei 1983, sou my pa 'n vlug Kaapstad toe haal om 'n vergadering daar by te woon. Net voor vieruur die middag het 'n bomontploffing die stad tot in sy fondamente geskud. Die storie het dadelik die nuus gehaal en die verslag het gesê die bom het reg voor die Poyntonsgebou ontplof.

Toe die nuus breek, het my ma dadelik na my pa se kantoor toe gebel, maar daar was geen antwoord nie. Daarna het sy die lughawe gebel om te hoor of my pa op die vlug was wat om en by sesuur sou vertrek, maar hulle het soos altyd geweier om inligting oor passasiers te verskaf. Ons kon niemand kry wat kon sê of my pa gedurende die ontploffing in die gebou was, of hy betyds en veilig lughawe toe vertrek het, en of hy dalk verbygestap of in sy motor uit die parkeergarage op pad was toe die bom ontplof het nie. Hy was ook gereeld met middagete by een van die restaurante in die omtrek, en ons het die ergste gevrees. Eers negeuur die aand, toe hy by sy hotelkamer in Kaapstad aankom, het hy ons gebel om te laat weet hy is veilig. Dit was die langste vyf uur van my lewe. Ons was so verlig om te weet hy het niks oorgekom nie. Ek het nie gevra waarom swart mense se teenstand teen apartheid so sterk was, of waarom hulle geweld moes gebruik nie. Die geweld het net my geloof in apartheid versterk en die verskil tussen wit en swart onderstreep.

Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), die militêre vleuel van die versetbeweging bekend as die African National Congress (ANC), het verantwoordelikheid vir die ontploffing aanvaar waarin negentien mense dood is (elf swart en agt wit) en tweehonderd-en-sewentien beseer is. Die Kerkstraatbom het in spitstyd ontplof. Die twee mans wat die daad beplan en uitgevoer het, is ook dood omdat die bom per ongeluk te vroeg ontplof het.

Umkhonto we Sizwe, wat 'spies van die nasie' beteken, het in 1961 ontstaan nadat Nelson Mandela en ander stigterslede besluit het geweld was die enigste opsie om die apartheidsregering se

gewelddadige optrede te beantwoord. Die regering het geweld gebruik om die ANC te beveg en om swart mense te onderdruk onder apartheid, en MK was die ANC se reaksie op dié geweld. In Nelson Mandela se toespraak in die laaste oomblikke van die Rivonia-verhoor in 1964, waar hy aangekla is van terrorisme, het hy nadat hy en ander lewenslank tronk toe gestuur is, oor MK gesê: 'Dit sou onrealisties en verkeerd wees vir swart leiers om vrede en vreedsame teenstand te predik op 'n tyd wat die regering vreedsame eise met geweld beantwoord.'

Nadat hy in 1962 in Ethiopië en Marokko militêre opleiding ontvang en ondersteuning vir MK bekom het, was Nelson Mandela gereed om tot geweld oor te gaan. Maar ek is nie seker of hy tydens sy tyd in die tronk geweet het waarmee die ANC-lede buite die tronk besig was en of gevangenes geraadpleeg is oor gewelddadige optrede nie. In 1983 was Oliver Tambo president van die ANC; Nelson Mandela was al vyf-en-sestig jaar oud en een-en-twintig jaar agter tralies en dit was moeilik om van buite met gevangenes te kommunikeer. Ek het hom later gevra of hy geweet het van die Kerkstraatbom, en hy het gesê hulle is later daarvan vertel.

Die ANC het geweet hy moes die rassistiese regering dwing om sy beleid te verander. Om dit reg te kry, moes hy geweld pleeg. Die regering was nie bereid om apartheid te beëindig of die lewenspeil van swart mense te verbeter nie en sou die swart weerstand eerder met geweld beveg. Die ANC het met teengeweld geantwoord. Hy het dit gedoen met aanvalle op strategiese aanlegte wat vir die regering noodsaaklik was. Die Poyntonsgebou was van strategiese belang omdat die hoofkwartier van die Suid-Afrikaanse Lugmag in dieselfde gebou was.

Ek was eintlik onbewus van dit wat in die land aangaan, die armoede van swart mense en die geweld, maar ek het geweet ons bly in afgeslote kokonne en dat ons in 'n bittere stryd teen mekaar was omdat ons nie kon saamleef nie. Ons het instinktief aanvaar dat ons moes omdraai en wegstap wanneer 'n swart mens nader kom. Ons leefwyse het dit aan ons opgedwing. Jy't nie geselsies met hulle aangeknoop nie en jy was bang vir hulle. Hulle was nie ons vriende nie. Ek was heel tevrede met my lewe soos dit was en ek het vroeg al geweet ons sluit saans ons deure en vensters omdat ons bang was

swart mense val ons in die nag aan. Die gedagte dat wit mense ons ook kon aanval, het nooit by my opgekom nie. Dit was altyd 'swartes'. Ek het nie gevra hoekom hulle ons sou wou aanval of wie hulle was, of hoe hulle lewens was nie. Ek het net geweet hulle is gevaarlik.

Sondae het ons plegtig in die kerk gebid vir die manne wat ons grense bewaak het. Dit was die regte ding om te doen, omdat almal dit gedoen het. Ten minste, almal in ons wit gemeenskap. Ek het nie geweet watter grens nie, maar ek het geweet hulle veg teen swart mense. Ek het net geweet wit mense verdedig ons grense teen swart mense wat ons land wou binnedring. Hoe vreemd dat 'n mens nooit gevra het wie hierdie swart mense was nie. Het ons ons grense beskerm teen nog swart mense wat ons land van buite wou binnedring, of teen ander militêre magte in die gebied wat die land wou binnekom om die ANC te ondersteun? Al wat hulle vir ons gesê het, was dit: Ons veg teen swart kommuniste. Ek is grootgemaak met die gedagte dat alle swart mense kommuniste en ateïste is. Tog was daar swart mense wat Sondae in klein groepies saamgetrek het om in die buitelug kerk te hou. Ek het my nie hieraan gesteur nie en ek kan nie onthou dat ek agtergekom het hul optrede stem nie ooreen met dit wat vir ons vertel is nie. As kind is dit maklik om die groep te volg as jy in 'n veilige samelewing grootword. As ek onderdruk was en nie toegang gehad het tot 'n ordentlike skool, 'n regte huis of water en elektrisiteit nie, sou ek dalk ander vrae gevra het, en sou my brein ontwikkel het in 'n rigting wat my vroeër in my lewe vrae oor ongeregtigheid sou laat vra het. Maar dit het nie gebeur nie.

Vandag besef ek ook dat die samelewing waarin 'n mens grootword 'n sekere leefstyl kies. Die mense om jou, volwassenes, besluit wat sosiaal aanvaarbaar en onaanvaarbaar is. Jy gaan aan met die lewe sonder om te besef daar is ook 'n groter prentjie: twispunte, beleidsrigtings, wêreldgebeure en neigings wat jou lewe beïnvloed. Wanneer jy in gemak lewe, vra jy nie vrae nie en ek het geen rede gehad om te vra wat buite ons huis gebeur nie. Geen mens kom die wêreld as 'n rassis binne nie. Jy word 'n rassis as gevolg van invloede van buite. En teen die tyd dat ek dertien was, was ek 'n rassis. Daarvolgens moes ek nooit die mens geword het wat die langste in Nelson Mandela se diens was as persoonlike assistent nie. Maar ek het.

2
Change

Perhaps something in my childhood suited me to Nelson Mandela.

When I was growing up, my mother often had severe spells of depression where she would simply cry for days or stay in bed and be depressed. We were never neglected but I do remember her sadness. One felt disempowered to do anything about it, not understanding what it was.

My mother is to this day one of the most decent, softly spoken, ladylike people I know. She has never sworn or used foul language in my presence. She has never spoken in a degrading manner to or about anyone, not even people that made her angry or people that harmed her in any way. She has calmness about her and reserves her extreme emotions for her inner self. I also never recall her being overly happy or excited about anything and she is moderate by nature. Her time spent in the orphanage while she was growing up obviously taught her to hide her emotions. It altered her. I recognized that burying of one's self in my years with Nelson Mandela later in life. He too had to suppress his emotions to survive prison.

My dad often got frustrated with Mom's depression and they would end up arguing about it and fighting because my mom would be so passive. My dad is a social person, the more the merrier, while my mother likes her own space and not socializing too much. I inherited that anti-social tendency from my mother. None of us realized just how troubled my mom really was.

One Friday afternoon, after playing at a friend's house, I returned home to an empty house. When I opened the kitchen door I heard mom's car in the garage. I didn't open the door to the garage but merely slipped into the house, lounging around. After a while, I heard

that the car was still in the garage, idling, but I didn't hear her opening the garage door to leave. I decided to go and look what was happening. When I opened the door between the house and the garage I vividly remember my mother resting her head against the window of the car, the car idling; she seemed asleep. I rushed to the car door and tried to open it. It was locked. I then noticed a pipe from the window and traced it to the car's exhaust. Only then did reality hit home. She was trying to commit suicide. I screamed and cried all at once and tried to force the door open.

I was twelve years of age and had little strength to make an impact. I slammed against the window but she didn't react and the rest of the events I cannot remember. I know that I called my grandmother and my gran arrived quickly because she lived around the corner. I don't know how my mom got out of the car to her bedroom, I don't know at what time Anton, my brother, came home or when the doctor arrived or my mom's best friend came. I don't remember if and who called my dad, who was travelling on business again. I don't remember where he was and I don't remember how they got hold of him – cellphones were not yet invented at the time. I do remember that this was the last day I smelled anything in my life. And that smell was gas. Doctors say that from the shock my body's ability to smell was shut off, a psychosomatic reaction to trauma.

My mom was admitted to a clinic for people suffering from depression, and stabilized. I was left constantly wondering why she would decide to leave me, just as she had been by her mom; wasn't I good enough? Did she love me enough to live? Was it me and my brother's endless fighting as siblings that drove her to do that? I was never angry at my mother, perhaps rather sad, and I felt abandoned.

Those events in the gas-filled garage in 1982 determined my relationships for ever. I am constantly terrified I will be abandoned. Left alone. So I overcompensate. I sacrifice myself to please people, hoping and trying to avoid a situation in which I find myself abandoned. And with the fear of abandonment comes the constant need for affirmation. It is not an ideal recipe for relationships of a romantic kind but it is ideal when you dedicate your life to your job and the world's most iconic statesman. In a strange twist, Nelson Mandela needed someone to devote themselves to him. To help him. He needed someone who was always there. Available to support him and to be depended upon. We complemented each other in a slightly co-dependent way. My need to please fitted with his need for absolute

loyalty.

* * *

But this was still to come. In 1988 I turned eighteen and completed school. The news was dominated by reports of killings of either policemen or 'cadres', as liberation fighters were referred to. Not a month passed without a bomb blast somewhere in the country. It became such a common occurrence that one later doesn't pay attention to numbers. There was death everywhere. South Africa was on the brink of a civil war. Violence erupted more often than not, and for the middle-class white Afrikaans people perhaps going to war against black people seemed like the only solution.

For me, though, life continued as before. My father had asked me: 'What do you want to study?' I had no idea, but since I was always engaged in cultural activities at school I opted to study acting. He gave me a definite 'No' and said that unless you are Sandra Prinsloo – one of South Africa's most successful and admired actresses – you had no chance at succeeding in the performing arts. It was my life's dream to become an actress. From childhood I remembered role-playing to be a secretary whenever I accompanied my dad to his office at weekends. My father convinced me, like most Afrikaner parents would have done at the time, to opt for a career in which job security took priority over following your passion, and I decided to enrol for a three-year National Diploma as Executive Secretary at the Technicon (now the Tshwane University of Technology) in Pretoria.

In September 1989, almost a year after my eighteenth birthday – the age at which South African citizens become legitimate voters – a general election was held. It excluded black people. No coloured, Indian or black people were allowed to vote under the apartheid laws. In South Africa's last national race-based elections the National Party lost ground and only managed to secure 48 per cent of the vote. The National Party had ruled since 1948. Its policies were based on apartheid, segregation and the promotion of the Afrikaner. People who supported them were known as Nats. Being a stern conservative, even more conservative than the Nats, I voted for the Conservative Party in 1989.

The Nats were beginning to talk about reform: allowing black people to vote, bringing an end to the Group Areas Act and discrimination against people based on the colour of their skin. The

Conservative Party opposed any change to apartheid laws and that year they became the official opposition, securing 31 per cent of the white vote. Though the total population at the time was estimated to be in the region of 30 million (there are no official figures available because black people were not counted as citizens), only about 3.1 million voters (all white) were registered, of which just over 1 million voted for the National Party's reform policies.

Unbeknown to anyone, Nelson Mandela had had his first meeting with the then President, P. W. Botha, on 4 July 1989. Mr Botha was known to oppose black majority rule, yet his willingness to meet with Mr Mandela set the tone of concessions to be made. At this point Nelson Mandela was spending his twenty-sixth year in prison. He had become the figurehead of the oppressed in South Africa even though very few people really knew him apart from his cadres. He was becoming the symbol of freedom for the masses in South Africa, even though the pictures that appeared of him were from the 1960s or were sketches of what people imagined he looked like at the time. No one was allowed access to the prison to ever take photographs of the ageing Nelson Mandela.

P. W. Botha abruptly resigned as President in August 1989, a month before the elections, after he felt that the then Minister of Education, F. W. de Klerk, had not consulted with him after a meeting he had with President Kenneth Kaunda from Zambia. Mr Botha felt undermined and resigned; Mr de Klerk was appointed Acting President for the month prior to the elections.

At this time, Nelson Mandela had been moved to Victor Verster Prison in the Paarl, close to Cape Town. He regularly met with President de Klerk and Mr de Klerk announced the release of the first long-serving political prisoners barely a month after becoming President. This was a landmark in South Africa's history: change became inevitable. I knew nothing about the prisoners being released and I can hardly remember that I paid attention to the announcement. These prisoners included Walter Sisulu, Andrew Mlangeni, Raymond Mhlaba and Ahmed Kathrada among others, some of Nelson Mandela's closest friends and colleagues. Who could have imagined that I would later adore some of these prisoners.

On 2 February 1990 President de Klerk announced the unconditional release of Nelson Mandela after being imprisoned for twenty-seven years. February in the north of Pretoria where my family lived is one of the hottest months in our summer. I was swimming in

our pool when my father came outside and the fact that someone was watching me distracted my attention. I could see that he had something on his mind. 'Yes Dad . . . ?' I said. He just looked at me and after a few moments of silence he replied, 'Now we are in trouble. The terrorist has been released.' My response was: 'Who's that?' and he replied: 'Nelson Mandela.' I had no idea who it was or what this meant to us. I could sense that he was worried but I continued swimming and left him to ponder about his announcement.

It was only much later after I had joined the Presidency that Mr Mandela told me that Mr de Klerk visited him a few days before the announcement of his release. He unceremoniously told Mr Mandela that he was free to go. Mr Mandela indicated that he couldn't leave immediately and that he needed to afford his people time to allow them to prepare for his release. He asked for an extra few days to allow people on the outside to prepare. If someone told me 'You are free to leave' after twenty-seven years I would ignore courtesy and run out, yet Mr Mandela wanted to stay to allow his people time to prepare. I often asked him whether he wasn't scared that the government could change its mind in those extra days. He looked at me, surprised that I would mistrust people in that way, laughed and then said 'No.'

It was of course only much later that I could comprehend what actually happened in South Africa at that time. Little did I know that Nelson Mandela was already aged seventy-one when he was released. Little did I know that he lost his mother and his son during his incarceration and that he was not allowed to attend their respective funerals at the time. The fact that he was a human being, a person with emotions, didn't cross my mind. All I knew was that we were in trouble, because my dad said so.

By 1992 the white National government called a referendum to decide on the future of apartheid. But, of course, whites only were allowed to vote in the referendum. The apartheid system that had been implemented in 1948 was withering. The white population was asked to express themselves in support or against the reform policies started by President de Klerk. Very few people shared the notion that reform would go further than they anticipated, but it was clear that apartheid was losing its few remaining supporters in the international community.

A total of 2.8 million whites voted in the referendum; 1.9 million were in favour of reform and an election in which non-white South

Africans could vote; 875,000 of my compatriots voted against the abolishment of apartheid. I voted 'NO' too. And I was proud of it. This was my contribution, I thought, to ensuring that the country remained governable. There was always this white Afrikaans fear that if the country was run by blacks it would become ungovernable and that they would run the whites into the ocean, take revenge for what whites denied them of for centuries.

Really it was all over by 1990, when Mr Mandela was released. It marked the end of apartheid and the beginning of a country where 'one man one vote' would apply, irrespective of the colour of your skin. But it all kind of passed me by as I was enjoying the life of being a student – the partying and late night studying to catch up on work that fell behind as a result of such partying. I had no involvement or even thought about politics or where South Africa was heading, even though I knew that apartheid had ended and that black people were free to move as they please. At social gatherings we sometimes referred briefly to what was unfolding in South Africa but never with informed detail and all playing on each other's white Afrikaner fears that, indeed, 'we were in trouble'. That was the totality of my understanding of the political situation and I wasn't bothered much.

I do recall driving to my uncle's farm in Ellisras in the north over Easter in April 1993 when we heard the news on the radio that Communist Party leader and chief of staff of the military wing of the ANC, the charismatic Chris Hani, had been killed. For whites in South Africa the communists held the real threat to our safety, security and financial future. Somehow Nelson Mandela was also considered a communist. Because South Africa, or our white world, was dominated by religion and what the church dictated, it was unthinkable that the Communist Party would ever occupy a legitimate space in South Africa. We were a capitalist state in which the whites owned and controlled all the resources.

When I asked my parents later about Chris Hani, I was told that it was a big mistake by whoever initiated his killing because even though Hani was a communist, surely he was a better deal for the white people than the so-called terrorist Mandela. I was confused by my parents' pronouncements because to me anything communist posed a serious threat, and even though Nelson Mandela had not been officially named a member of the Communist Party, surely Chris Hani was more dangerous, being the leader of that party? According to my parents, Chris Hani had exhibited some tolerance towards white

people, probably because he hadn't been imprisoned on Robben Island like Nelson Mandela, and therefore they obviously assumed that he didn't have the hatred Mr Mandela supposedly had.

Little did we know, or care, that Mr Mandela had no bitterness. He had secretly been talking about negotiations with the government from prison, determined to bring about a peaceful transition. As Ahmed Kathrada, one of Madiba's closest friends and a fellow prisoner, said, 'Forgiveness is a choice.' One inherently always expects the worst and we expected Nelson Mandela to live up to our expectations.

It was during these riveting and dangerous political times that I fell in love and got engaged. My aspirations were limited to getting married and having children, like most young Afrikaans women my age. I was only twenty-two years of age but it didn't matter. I had also graduated and I started my first job at the Department of State Expenditure in 1992 as a secretary. A few months into the job I became bored and asked for a more challenging position. I was transferred to the Human Resources division within the same department as an administrative clerk, working in mid-town Pretoria.

Apartheid had ended but life continued unchanged. We didn't feel the end of apartheid in our everyday lives. We still 'lived' apartheid even though politically changes started to emerge prior to the 1994 elections. Violence and unrest continued in far off communities, and we were continuously confronted with the pictures of dead people in rural areas. The violence was no longer only black against white but now also due to tensions between the ANC and Inkatha Freedom Party. The IFP was the ANC's biggest rival at the time.

Then my engagement ended. I was distraught and lost. What I usually do when relationships fail is that I throw myself into my work, completely and utterly, as a way of dealing with pain.

On 10 May 1994 South Africa's first democratically elected black President was inaugurated. I was twenty-three years of age and putting in every extra hour of overtime to build my career in the Human Resources department of the Department of State Expenditure. Even though the day of his swearing in was a public holiday, I was on my way to work to put in extra time. There was hardly any traffic and people avoided the streets out of fear for the outbreak of violence following the inauguration of the ANC government, which was seen as the enemy to all white people, even those whites who voted in favour of reform and for apartheid to end. An ANC government in power

meant that the majority of our leadership would change to black people, and that seriously challenged white supremacy. It was pay-back time and we expected black people to settle scores with us whites for centuries of oppression. Military vehicles were visible everywhere in the suburbs and police cars ready to respond on instructions. Still, this didn't affect my life and I found myself safe in the comfort of my office during the inauguration. As long as the police, still from the previous regime, were visible in the streets, surely we were safe. I do recall driving home seeing black people along the street and people smiling, looking happy, cheering and dancing. My thoughts were simple: Yes, you can now do as you please but please don't kill us tonight because we are white.

Prior to the elections some white people collected tinned food and perishables out of fear of civil war, violence and disruption. We expected black people to take over the country and now deprive us of basic services, that they would raid shops and create absolute chaos, sabotaging water and power supply to white suburbs. People stocked up and gathered bottled water, candles, tinned food and whatever would last them and be needed in an emergency. We expected revenge.

But that night nothing happened and we all woke up the next morning, went back to work and to our normal way of life, untouched by the previous day's events and whoever was leading this country. Life continued in a strangely unaffected way. We still had our house, we were still alive and water still came from the tap. Nothing was there to indicate that soon the very foundations of my life, my ignorance, my beliefs, my values were to be shaken up and tested. Little did I know that I would emerge from that paranoid, white cocoon of fear and denial and that the man who would lead me out of that – gently holding my hand – would be Nelson Mandela.

2

Verandering

Miskien is daar iets uit my kleintyd wat gemaak het dat ek by Nelson Mandela inpas.

In my grootwordjare het my ma gereeld aan depressie gely, en dan sou sy dae aaneen huil en in die bed bly en met die siekte worstel. Ons is nooit afgeskeep nie, maar ek onthou haar hartseer. 'n Mens voel magteloos. Jy kan niks daaraan doen nie en jy kan dit nie verstaan nie.

My ma is tot vandag toe een van die ordentlikste, mees saggeaarde mense wat ek ken. 'n Ware dame. Sy het nog nooit voor my gevloek of 'n growwe woord gebruik nie. Sy het nooit iemand sleggesê nie, nie eers iemand wat haar kwaad gemaak of op enige manier leed aangedoen het nie. Sy het 'n kalmte om haar en hou haar diepste emosies vir haarself. Ek kan ook nie onthou dat sy ooit buitengewoon opgewonde of gelukkig was nie. Sy is van nature gematigd. Haar kinderdae in die weeshuis het haar duidelik geleer om haar emosies weg te steek. Dit het haar verander. Ek het dieselfde neiging om emosies in te perk later by Nelson Mandela bespeur terwyl ek vir hom gewerk het. Om die tronk te oorleef, moes hy ook in homself keer.

My ma se depressie het my pa gereeld gefrustreer en dit sou op 'n stryery uitloop omdat my ma altyd so passief was. My pa is 'n sosiale mens – hoe meer siele, hoe meer vreugde – terwyl my ma haar eie ruimte verkies en min sosiale kontak met mense het. Ek het my ma se asosiale neiging oorgeërf. Nie een van ons het besef hoeveel pyn my ma regtig ervaar het nie.

Een Vrydagaand, nadat ek by 'n maatjie gaan speel het, het ek by 'n leë huis aangekom. Toe ek die agterdeur oopmaak, het ek my ma se motor in die motorhuis gehoor. Ek het nie die motorhuis se deur oopgemaak nie, maar teruggeglip in die huis en sommer net rondgesit. Na 'n rukkie het ek gehoor die motor luier nog steeds, maar ek het nie die deur hoor oopgaan sodat sy kan ry nie. Ek het besluit om te gaan kyk wat aangaan.

Ek onthou nog goed: Toe ek die deur tussen die huis en die motorhuis oopmaak, het ek gesien my ma se kop rus teen die venster van haar motor, terwyl dit aanhou luier. Dit het gelyk of sy slaap. Ek het na die motor toe gestorm en die deur probeer oopmaak. Dit was gesluit. Dis toe dat ek sien daar kom 'n pyp by die venster uit. Ek het dit tot by die uitlaatpyp gevolg. Op daardie oomblik het die waarheid my getref: Sy

het probeer selfmoord pleeg. Ek het gegil en gehuil en probeer om die deur oop te dwing.

Ek was twaalf jaar oud en het nie die fisieke vermoë gehad om 'n verskil te maak nie. Ek het teen die venster gehamer, maar sy het glad nie gereageer nie. Ek onthou nie wat daarna gebeur het nie. Ek weet ek het my ouma gebel en sy was vinnig daar, omdat sy net om die hoek gebly het. Ek weet nie hoe my ma van haar motor tot by haar slaapkamer gekom het nie; ek weet nie wanneer my broer, Anton, tuisgekom het of wanneer die dokter of my ma se beste vriendin daar aangekom het nie. Ek onthou nie of iemand my pa gebel het en, indien wel, wie dit was nie. Hy was weer op 'n sakereis. Ek kan nie onthou waar hy was of hoe hulle hom in die hande gekry het nie – dit was nog die tyd vóór selfone in Suid-Afrika. Ek onthou wel dat dit die laaste dag was wat ek enigiets kon ruik. En wat ek geruik het, was gas. Dokters sê die skok het my reukvermoë afgestomp; 'n psigosomatiese reaksie op die trauma.

My ma is opgeneem in 'n kliniek vir depressielyers en haar toestand het gestabiliseer. Ek het onophoudelik gewonder hoekom sy sou besluit het om my te verlaat, net soos haar ma haar verlaat het. Was ek nie goed genoeg nie? Was sy lief genoeg vir my om te wil aanhou lewe? Was dit die aanhoudende stryery tussen my en my broer wat haar daartoe gedryf het? Ek was nooit kwaad vir my ma nie, dalk net hartseer, en ek het versaak gevoel.

Daardie gebeure in 1982 in die gasgevulde motorhuis het al my verhoudings daarna beïnvloed. Ek is altyd vreesbevange dat ek verwerp sal word en alleen sal agterbly. Daarom is ek geneig om te hard te probeer. Ek offer myself op om ander tevrede te stel, in die hoop dat ek 'n situasie sal skep waarin ek nie verwerp sal word nie. En saam met die vrees vir verwerping kom 'n konstante behoefte aan bevestiging. Dis nie die ideale resep vir 'n romantiese verhouding nie, maar ideaal vir iemand wat haar lewe aan haar werk oorgee. En aan die wêreld se grootste staatsman. Soos die noodlot dit wou hê, het Nelson Mandela iemand nodig gehad wat haar lewe aan hom kon wy. Om hom te ondersteun in sy pligte. Hy het iemand nodig gehad wat altyd beskikbaar sou wees om hom te ondersteun en altyd betroubaar te wees op professionele vlak. Ons het mekaar op 'n manier aangevul wat van ons mede-afhanklikes gemaak het. My drang om tevrede te

stel, het volmaak ingepas by sy behoefte aan algehele lojaliteit.

Maar dit was in die toekoms. Ek het in 1988 agttien geword en matriek geskryf. Berigte van moord op polisiemanne of 'kaders', soos vryheidsvegters hulself genoem het, het die nuus oorheers. Daar het nie 'n maand verbygegaan waarin daar nie 'n bom iewers in die land ontplof het nie. Dit was later so 'n alledaagse verskynsel dat 'n mens ophou tel het. Dood was oral. Suid-Afrika was op die rand van 'n burgeroorlog. Geweld was meer volop as vrede en vir wit middelklas-Afrikaners het 'n oorlog teen swart mense na die enigste oplossing gelyk.

Maar vir my het die lewe op dieselfde trant voortgegaan. My pa het my gevra: 'Wat wil jy studeer?' Ek het geen benul gehad nie, maar omdat ek altyd by die skool se kulturele aktiwiteite betrokke was, het ek beluit ek wil 'n aktrise word. Hy het my met 'n besliste 'nee' geantwoord en gesê tensy jy Sandra Prinsloo – een van Suid-Afrika se suksesvolste en gewildste aktrises – is, is die uitvoerende kunste 'n doodloopstraat. Dit was my lewensdroom om 'n aktrise te word. Van kleintyd af het ek die kamma-rol van sekretaresse vertolk wanneer ek oor naweke saam met my pa by sy kantoor was. My pa het my oortuig, soos die meeste Afrikaanse ouers destyds sou gedoen het, om 'n loopbaan te kies waarin ek seker sou wees van werk, eerder as om my droom na te jaag, en ek het besluit om by die Pretoriase Technikon – nou die Tshwane Universiteit van Tegnologie – in te skryf vir 'n Nasionale Diploma en my as uitvoerende sekretaresse te bekwaam. Dit was 'n driejaarkursus.

In September 1989, amper 'n jaar ná my agttiende verjaardag, is 'n nasionale verkiesing aangekondig. Dit het swart mense uitgesluit. Kragtens die apartheidswette is geen bruin mense, Indiërs of swart mense toegelaat om te stem nie. In Suid-Afrika se laaste verkiesing wat tot wit mense beperk was, het die Nasionale Party steun verloor en net 48% van die stemme getrek. Die Nasionale Party was sedert 1948 aan die bewind. Sy beleid was gegrond op apartheid, afsondering en bevordering van die Afrikaner. Die party se ondersteuners het as Natte bekend gestaan. Ek was aartskonserwatief, selfs meer konserwatief as die Natte, en het in 1989 vir die Konserwatiewe Party gestem.

Die Natte het van hervorming begin praat: die moontlikheid van

stemreg vir swart mense, die afskaffing van die Groepsgebiedewet en diskriminasie teen mense op grond van hul velkleur. Die Konserwatiewe Party het alle veranderings aan die apartheidswette teengestaan en daardie jaar die amptelike opposisie geword, met 31% van die wit stemme. Hoewel die bevolkingstal destyds op om en by dertig miljoen geskat is (daar was nie amptelike syfers beskikbaar nie omdat swart mense nie as burgers gereken is nie), was net 3,1 miljoen mense, almal wit, as kiesers geregistreer. Een miljoen van hulle het vir die Nasionale Party se hervormingsbeleid gestem.

Sonder dat enigeen daarvan weet, het Nelson Mandela sy eerste ontmoeting met die destydse president, P.W. Botha, op 4 Julie 1989 gehad. Dit was bekend dat Botha gekant was teen 'n swart meerderheidsregering, maar sy bereidwilligheid om met Nelson Mandela te praat het die klimaat geskep vir die toegewings wat later gemaak sou word. In daardie stadium het Nelson Mandela sy ses-en-twintigste jaar agter tralies uitgedien. Hy was teen dié tyd die simbool van die onderdruktes in Suid-Afrika, hoewel min mense – buiten dié wat na aan hom was – veel van hom geweet het. Vir die massas in Suid-Afrika het hy 'n simbool van vryheid begin word, hoewel die laaste bekende foto's van hom in die 1960's geneem is. Daar was ook sketse deur kunstenaars wat wou raai hoe meneer Mandela in ses-en-twintig jaar sou verouder het. Niemand is ooit toegelaat om foto's van hom in die tronk te neem nie.

In Augustus 1989, 'n maand voor die verkiesing, het president P.W. Botha onverwags bedank nadat hy uitgevind het dat F.W. de Klerk, die minister van onderwys, president Kenneth Kaunda van Zambië ontmoet het sonder om hom daaroor te raadpleeg. Hy het gevoel sy gesag word ondermyn en het bedank. Meneer De Klerk is as waarnemende president aangewys vir die maand voor die verkiesing.

Teen hierdie tyd was Nelson Mandela reeds in die Victor Verstergevangenis in die Paarl naby Kaapstad. Hy het gereeld gesprekke gevoer met meneer De Klerk, wat die vrylating van die eerste groep langtermynpolitieke gevangenes skaars 'n maand ná sy aanstelling as president aangekondig het. Dit was 'n mylpaal in Suid-Afrika se geskiedenis: verandering was nou onkeerbaar. Ek het niks van die gevangenes se vrylating geweet nie. Ek kan nie onthou dat ek daaroor gedink het nie. Die gevangenes wat vrygelaat sou word, het

Walter Sisulu, Andrew Mlangeni, Raymond Mhlaba en Ahmed Kathrada ingesluit; sommige van Nelson Mandela se beste vriende en vertrouelinge. Wie sou kon glo dat ek later so lief sou word vir party van hulle?

Op 2 Februarie 1990 het president De Klerk aangekondig Nelson Mandela word onvoorwaardelik vrygelaat ná sewe-en-twintig jaar se gevangenskap. In die noorde van Pretoria, waar my gesin gebly het, is Februarie een van die warmste maande van die somer. Ek was in ons swembad toe my pa buitentoe kom. Ek kon sien hy het iets op die hart. 'Ja, Pa?' het ek gevra.

Hy het net na my gekyk en ná 'n kort stilte geantwoord: 'Nou is ons in die moeilikheid. Die terroris word vrygelaat.'

My antwoord daarop was: 'Wie is dit?'

'Nelson Mandela,' het hy gesê. Ek het geen idee gehad wie dit was of wat dit vir ons sou beteken nie. Ek kon agterkom hy is bekommerd, maar ek het aangehou swem terwyl hy oor sy aankondiging nadink.

Baie later, nadat ek by die presidensie aangesluit het, het meneer Mandela my vertel dat president De Klerk hom 'n paar dae voor die aankondiging van sy vrylating ontmoet het. Hy het sonder seremonie vir meneer Mandela gesê hy word vrygelaat. Meneer Mandela het gesê hy kan nie dadelik gaan nie; hy moes sy mense kans gee om vir sy vrylating voor te berei. Hy het 'n paar ekstra dae gevra sodat sy mense die publiek ook hiervoor kon gereed maak. As enigeen ná sewe-entwintig jaar in die tronk vir my gesê het 'Jy is vry, jy kan gaan', sou ek my nie aan hoflikheid gesteur het nie. Ek sou uithardloop, maar meneer Mandela wou bly om sy mense tyd te gun om gereed te maak. Ek het hom gereeld gevra of hy nie bang was die regering verander van plan voor hy vrygelaat sou word nie. Hy het na my gekyk, verbaas dat ek mense so kan wantrou, gelag en 'nee' gesê.

Dit was natuurlik ook heelwat later voor ek verstaan het wat regtig destyds in Suid-Afrika aan die gang was. Ek het nie geweet Nelson Mandela was al een-en-sewentig toe hy vrygelaat is nie. Ek het ook nie geweet sy ma en seun is dood terwyl hy in die tronk was nie, en dat hy nie een van die twee se begrafnisse kon bywoon nie. Die feit dat hy 'n mens was, iemand met emosies, het nie by my opgekom nie. Ek het net geweet ons was in die moeilikheid, want my pa het so gesê.

In 1992 het die wit regering ’n referendum uitgeroep sodat kiesers oor die toekoms van apartheid kon besluit. Maar natuurlik is net wit mense toegelaat om in die referendum te stem. Die apartheidsbestel wat in 1948 in werking getree het, was besig om te verkrummel. Die wit bevolking is gevra om te besluit of hulle ten gunste van F.W. de Klerk se hervormingsbeleid is of nie. Min mense het geglo hervorming sou veel verder gaan as dit wat hulle in daardie stadium kon sien, maar dit was duidelik dat apartheid besig was om sy laaste ondersteuners in die internasionale gemeenskap te verloor.

Altesaam 2,8 miljoen kiesers het in die referendum gestem: 1,9 miljoen was ten gunste van hervorming en ’n algemene verkiesing, weer net vir wit mense; agthonderd-vyf-en-sewentigduisend van my landgenote het teen die afskaffing van apartheid gestem. Ek het ook daarteen gestem. En ek was trots daarop. Dit was my bydrae, het ek geglo, om te verseker dat die land regeerbaar sou bly. Daar was altyd ’n vrees onder wit Afrikaners dat die land onregeerbaar sou wees met swart mense in beheer en dat hulle die wit mense in die see sou jaag om wraak te neem vir dit wat die wit mense hulle ontsê het.

Alles was teen 1990 verby toe meneer Mandela vrygelaat is. Dit het die einde van apartheid ingelui en die begin van ’n land waarin mense van alle bevolkingsgroepe stemreg sou kry. Maar al hierdie dinge het feitlik ongesiens by my verbygegaan terwyl ek die studentelewe geniet het – die partytjies en laatnagstudies om die tyd in te haal wat ek as gevolg van die partytjies verloor het. Ek was glad nie by die politiek betrokke nie en ek het glad nie daaroor gedink nie. Ook nie oor die toekoms waarop Suid-Afrika afstuur nie, hoewel ek geweet het apartheid is verby en swart mense kan nou rondbeweeg soos hulle wil. By sosiale geleenthede het ons partykeer vir ’n kort tydjie gepraat oor die dinge wat besig was om te gebeur, maar ons was nie goed ingelig nie. Ons het net mekaar se wit Afrikanervrese versterk dat ons inderdaad ‘in die moeilikheid’ was. Dit was die somtotaal van my begrip van die politiek en dit het my min gepla.

Ek onthou wel dat ons tydens Paasfees in 1993 op pad was na my oom se plaas in Ellisras in die noorde toe ons op die radionuus hoor die leier van die Suid-Afrikaanse Kommunistiese Party en personeelhoof van die ANC se militêre vleuel, Chris Hani, is vermoor. Vir wit mense in Suid-Afrika het die kommuniste die ware bedreiging

ingehou vir ons veiligheid en finansiële toekoms. Mense het aangeneem Nelson Mandela is ook 'n kommunis. Omdat Suid-Afrika, of ons wit wêreldjie, deur godsdiens en die kerk se voorskrifte oorheers is, was dit ondenkbaar dat die SAKP ooit 'n regmatige plek in die land sou kon hê. Ons was 'n kapitalistiese land waarin die wit mense al die hulpbronne beheer het.

Toe ek my ouers later oor Chris Hani uitvra, het hulle gesê wie ook al vir sy dood verantwoordelik was, het 'n groot fout gemaak, want al was Hani 'n kommunis, was hy seer sekerlik verkieslik bo die terroris Nelson Mandela. My ouers se standpunt het my verwar omdat enigiets te doen met kommunisme vir my 'n bedreiging verteenwoordig het, en waar Nelson Mandela nooit amptelik 'n kommunis genoem is nie, was Hani die partyleier. Volgens my ouers was hy tot 'n mate verdraagsaam teenoor wit mense, waarskynlik omdat hy nooit op Robbeneiland gevange gehou is soos Nelson Mandela nie, en om dié rede het hulle aanvaar hy sou minder haatdraend as meneer Mandela gewees het.

Ons het nie geweet, of omgegee, dat meneer Mandela glad nie bitter was nie. Terwyl hy in die tronk was, het hy in die geheim met die regering begin praat oor onderhandelings, vasbeslote om 'n vreedsame oorgang te bewerkstellig. Soos Ahmed Kathrada, een van Madiba se beste vriende en 'n medegevangene, dit gestel het: 'Vergifnis is 'n keuse'. 'n Mens het 'n natuurlike geneigdheid om die ergste te verwag, en ons het aanvaar dat Nelson Mandela aan dié verwagtinge sou voldoen.

Dit was in hierdie meesleurende en gevaarlike politieke tye dat ek verlief en verloof geraak het. Al wat ek wou hê, was om te trou en kinders te hê, soos die meeste Afrikanermeisies van my ouderdom. Ek was net twee-en-twintig, maar dit het nie saak gemaak nie. Ek het ook my diploma verwerf en in 1992 my eerste werk begin as sekretaresse by die departement van staatsbesteding. Ná 'n paar maande in die pos het ek verveeld begin raak en gevra om geskuif te word na iets wat meer uitdagings bied. Ek is na menslike hulpbronne in dieselfde afdeling oorgeplaas as administratiewe klerk in 'n kantoor in Pretoria se middestad.

Apartheid is afgeskaf, maar die lewe het onveranderd voortgegaan. Die einde van apartheid het nie 'n impak op ons lewens gehad nie.

Ons het apartheid steeds 'geleef', al het politieke veranderinge voor die verkiesing in 1994 begin. Geweld en onrus het in verafgeleë gemeenskappe voortgeduur, en daar was oral foto's van dooie mense in plattelandse gebiede. Die geweld was nie meer net swart mense wat wit mense aanval nie, maar ook die gevolg van spanning tussen die ANC en die Inkhata-Vryheidsparty. Die IVP was in daardie tyd die ANC se grootste teenstander.

Toe is my verlowing verbreek. My hart was gebroke en ek het verlore gevoel. Wat ek gewoonlik doen wanneer verhoudings eindig, is om myself geheel en al aan my werk oor te gee as 'n manier om die pyn te verwerk.

Suid-Afrika se eerste demokraties verkose swart president is op 10 Mei 1994 ingehuldig. Ek was drie-en-twintig en ek het soveel oortydure gewerk as wat ek kon om my loopbaan by menslike hulpbronne te bevorder. Al was die dag van die inhuldiging 'n openbare vakansiedag, is ek werk toe om ekstra ure in te sit. Daar was amper geen verkeer nie en mense het die strate vermy uit vrees dat daar geweld sou uitbreek ná die ANC-regering se oorname. Die ANC is nog gesien as die vyand van alle wit mense, selfs dié van hulle wat ten gunste van hervorming en die einde van apartheid gestem het. 'n ANC-regering wat in beheer van die land staan, het beteken dat die meerderheid van ons leierskap na swart mense oorgeplaas sou word, en dit was 'n groot uitdaging vir wit heerskappy. Dit was tyd om ons skuld te betaal en ons het verwag dat swart mense wraak sou neem teen ons wit mense ná al die jare van onderdrukking. Militêre voertuie was oral in die voorstede te sien en polisiemotors het gereed gestaan sodat opdragte uitgevoer kon word. Nogtans het dit nie my lewe geraak nie en ek het myself ten tyde van die inhuldiging in die gemak van my kantoor bevind. Solank die polisie, steeds dié van die vorige regering, sigbaar op straat was, was ons sekerlik veilig. Ek onthou wel dat ek op pad huis toe verby swart mense gery het en mense wat glimlag. Hulle het gelukkig gelyk en gejuig en gedans. Daar het 'n eenvoudige gedagte deur my kop gegaan: Ja, julle kan nou doen wat julle wil, maar moet ons asseblief nie vanaand kom doodmaak omdat ons wit is nie.

Voor die verkiesing het sommige wit mense blikkieskos en bederfbare goedere opgegaar uit vrees vir 'n burgeroorlog, geweld en

ontwrigting. Ons het verwag dat swart mense die regering sou oorneem en basiese dienste van ons sou wegvat; dat hulle winkels sou stroop en oral chaos sou saai, ons watertoevoer sou saboteer en ons elektrisiteit sou afsny. Party mense het ook gebottelde water, kerse, blikkieskos en enige lewensmiddele opgegaar wat hulle gereken het in geval van nood nuttig sou wees. Ons het wraak verwag.

Maar daardie nag het niks gebeur nie en ons het die volgende oggend opgestaan, terug werk toe gegaan en met ons normale lewens voortgegaan, onaangeraak deur die vorige dag se gebeure en deur wie ook al die land lei. Die lewe het op ’n vreemde manier ongehinderd voortgegaan. Ons het nog steeds ons huise gehad, ons het nog gelewe en daar het nog steeds water uit ons krane gekom. Daar was geen rede om te glo dat die hele grondslag van my bestaan – my oningeligtheid, my sienings, my waardes – geskud en getoets sou word nie. Min het ek geweet dat ek uit daardie paranoïese wit kokon van vrees en ontkenning sou kom en dat die man wat my daaruit sou lei, met sy hand liggies in myne, Nelson Mandela sou wees.

PART TWO

Start of a New Dawn

1994–1999

3

Meeting Mr Mandela

Soon after the elections in 1994 the incoming government needed to recruit new people. My department was tasked to help with the huge project of making the former apartheid government more ‘representative’, in other words we had to hire more black people. It was the beginning of transformation. South Africa was to be governed for all. It would represent all its people.

Thousands and thousands of people applied. It took us weeks to come up with short-lists for posts advertised. It was clear that there was a great shortage of skilled people but that indeed people in South Africa were desperate for work. A lot of applications couldn’t be processed as a result of illiteracy, applicants having been denied a decent education during apartheid. I worked very hard to process these applications. There was no incentive to do so but my nature is such that if given a task I have to complete it in the shortest possible time. I am one of those people who like to clear things off their mental notes and I often work unnecessarily at a pace that is not required. I was looking for a new job, I wanted a new start, away from my broken engagement, but in the meantime I focused all my attention on processing applications.

Then a colleague told me about a typist’s job being advertised in an administrative department attached to the newly established President’s office. The position would mean being based six months of the year in Pretoria and six months in Cape Town. Whenever Parliament was in session, politicians, their families and support staff lived and worked from Cape Town as our Parliament is housed in Cape Town. Whenever Parliament went in recess, politicians and their families and staff would move back to Pretoria, the administrative

capital. It is something I had always dreamt of doing and the fact that the job was on a lower rank than the one I currently occupied didn't matter. What I also found attractive was that the position was advertised for the Minister without Portfolio and I thought that surely someone without a portfolio didn't have a lot of work and it therefore couldn't be too hard to work for him. Later of course I learned that 'without portfolio' simply meant that the minister could be tasked with ad hoc issues and therefore had no fixed portfolio or agenda to attend to.

I soon started discussions within my own department to inform my seniors that I would apply for the job, providing that I could be transferred on the same salary scale if I was successful in the application. They agreed.

The job interview was at the Union Buildings. Not only was I no longer rolling around on the lawn, but a black man was now the most powerful man in South Africa. And he was making sure people like me, conservative Afrikaans white folk, were included in this new government. People were friendly and relaxed and I noticed that there were still a lot of white faces around despite the new ANC government being in power.

During the interview, a black lady entered. She appeared cheerful and flamboyant. Dressed in a colourful satin outfit it was a picture I was not used to – that of a black lady dressed in such style and clearly in something that was more expensive than my mother's most prized outfit. We were rudely interrupted by her during the interview but she exclaimed to my interviewers: 'I need a typist and I don't care if she's black or white but I need her right now.' I smiled and thought: I'm your person. I had no idea what her position was. She briefly exchanged a few words with my two interviewers and then left. My interviewers telephoned me hours after the interview to ask whether I would be interested in a typist position in the actual President's office itself, and it was explained that it would involve working in his personal office. I only had Cape Town in mind, and since they assured me that the job would be on the same terms as the advertised post, I said I was interested.

They told me that the lady that had entered the interview before was the President's private secretary. My understanding was that I was going to work for her, Mary Mxadana, and she looked fairly pleasant. While still working at the Department of State Expenditure I had been tasked to train two junior black officials who had joined our

department after the transformation process kicked in. They appeared friendly and I ended up working well with them. Slowly but surely I was starting to see black people a little differently. I was no longer inherently scared of all black people. I was starting to converse with them in normal language, without thinking that they could only understand broken Afrikaans or English. Mary was friendly and she made me feel at ease even though I had my doubts.

I realized that I was going to work in an office that was closer to the political centre of the beliefs I still opposed but I thought it was just a job and I wouldn't have much to do with real politics. I was willing to compromise and by then toyed with the idea that I actually liked the President of the Inkatha Freedom Party, Dr Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the opposition to the ANC. I liked him from seeing him on TV during the election campaign and I thought that since I had changed my mind about him, Nelson Mandela couldn't be that bad either. I was willing to give it a try but was very realistic about the fact that if I didn't like working there, nothing would stop me from leaving.

I can't remember feeling anything except relief when I was called and offered the position. Two weeks after the interview I assumed duty in the President's office as senior ministerial typist.

* * *

On 12 October 1994 I walked into the Union Buildings for the first time as an employee of President Mandela's personal office. I had seen pictures of him but knew nothing about him apart from the fact that he spent a long time in prison on Robben Island and that my family regarded him a terrorist. I didn't expect to have any interactions with him or ever see him.

I was well on time and received in reception by another staffer who took me through several glass doors and through security checks to reach what was known as the President's suite. It constituted a few offices along a corridor. She showed me a desk and computer in what looked like a 'pool' office, even though the only other desk was hers. She was an administrator answering the President's private office switchboard and assisting with ad hoc administration.

She explained that the President's personal office consisted of only Mary, herself and Elize Wessels. Elize was from the de Klerk government and used to work for the former First Lady, Marike de

Klerk.

I sensed there was a tense atmosphere between the 'old' or white staff and the 'new' or black staff and that people were still marking territory and claiming positions in the new government. It was also clear that the 'old' guard were there to slowly ease the new leadership into power, guiding and teaching them, willing or unwillingly.

It was only much later that Mary arrived at the office. She had a presence about her that could be felt even without noticing her at first. She carried authority and dressed colourfully, which added to her vibrant personality. She entered the office like a whirlwind and hugged me to welcome me to the office. She was extremely friendly and made me feel at ease. Not having worked for a black person before, I was reluctant to let my defences go too soon. There was a superficial trust between black and white people. We still didn't know what to expect of one another. I was prepared to work for her but I held on to my political beliefs, thinking that my practical and financial situation had forced me to be in this office.

It is not necessarily a trait of all Afrikaners but generally speaking we have respect for people of authority or elderly people; whether we agree with their policies or not we were always courteous. If your principles did not allow you to respect a person you would simply ignore that person. I found I respected Mary. She told me about the liberation struggle. I started to be intrigued by the history of my own country. It felt like I had lived on another planet and I was completely unaware of anything she was telling me. Perhaps it was precisely that innocence and ignorance that made her feel at ease with me. She was very warm and friendly towards me and we shared a passion for music. She told me about her choir and brought me a CD to listen to. Her husband was the conductor of the choir and she was one of the founding members. They sang like angels.

Over the next two weeks I was orientated more about the operations around the President. He was nowhere to be seen or heard and I started assuming that I would possibly see him at a distance 'one day', but I did meet a number of people, from Parks Mankahlana, whom I was told spoke on the President's behalf, to Tony Trew, whom I was told helped write all the President's speeches, to the head of our office, referred to as the Director General of the Presidency, Professor Jakes Gerwel. It took me some time to figure out who did what and to remember names.

My main task was to type for Mary and to update the President's

programme regularly. She soon taught me how to distribute the programme to the President's security and I was told to ensure that I sent it to both the white and the black commanders of his security team simultaneously. The South African Police Service was going through a transformation process like all government departments and amalgamating the ANC's old military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, and Apla from Azapo, another of the old liberation struggle parties, into the old white-dominated police force. Not everything made sense immediately and I would have to send the same fax twice to the same number but mark it for different people's attention. It was clearly a cosmetic merger in the police force and the two sides were very much operating independently, still trying to establish trust. But I'm a person who lives by the book. If instructions are issued, I follow them to the letter, and I did so without questioning or arguing about practicalities.

About two weeks into my time at the Presidency the President was scheduled to be in the office for the first time. By this time Mary had told me a little about the President, what type of person he was and that he was kind but disciplined. Afrikaners grow up with a sense of respect for any authority and before having met him, I had respect for him, purely because he was the President of the country. He hadn't done anything publicly to prove the contrary and I therefore had no reason to disrespect him.

From my early arrival at the office that morning I could sense an unusual tension within the building but at the same time a kind of excitement. The police guarding our private office were alert and their uniforms neatly pressed, and soon a team of men in dark suits arrived presenting themselves as the advance team of the President's bodyguards. It was then time for the President to arrive and I closed the door leading to my office so as not to disturb anything that might be happening in the corridors. From passing footsteps and ructions I gathered that the President had arrived and he went past my office down the corridor into his office. Guests arrived to see him and were taken to his office without delay. They were all punctual and everything flowed with military precision. I sat quietly in my chair, awaiting instructions from anyone. I had noticed that the bodyguards were all armed and I was tense and cautious not to make any sudden move that could be misinterpreted. It was my first encounter with armed people in close proximity, and it made me nervous.

A few hours later Mary asked me to type something and bring it to

her office once I was ready. So I did. I was looking at the piece of paper in front of me when I nearly bumped into President Nelson Mandela as he was exiting Mary's office into the corridor surrounded by bodyguards. He extended his hand first to shake mine; I was confused and not sure whether it was proper for me to greet him. I said, 'Good morning, Mr Mandela.' One doesn't really know what to do at that point except cry. Which I did. It was all too much. I was sobbing. He then spoke to me but I didn't understand him and was completely in shock. I had to say 'Excuse me Mr President' for him to repeat what he had just said to me, and after gathering my thoughts or guts – I'm not sure which – I realized that he addressed me in Afrikaans. My home language.

He was visibly old and appeared kind. I focused on the wrinkles on his face and his warm, sincere smile. He spoke with a caring voice and in a kind manner and asked me my name. I was ready to pull back my hand after shaking his but he held on. I could feel the texture of his hand on mine and I started perspiring. I wasn't sure if I was supposed to hold this black man's hand. I wanted him to let go but he didn't and he asked where I came from and where I worked. I wasn't sure whether to answer in Afrikaans or English and cannot remember which I chose, but we conversed in a mixture of Afrikaans and English. I was completely overtaken by emotion and couldn't continue. I then had a feeling of guilt that swept over me. I felt guilty that this kindly spoken man with gentle eyes and generosity of spirit spoke to me in my own language after 'my people' had sent him to jail for so many years. I instantly regretted voting 'No' in the referendum. How do you correct all of that prejudice in five minutes? Suddenly, I wanted to apologize. I hadn't given any thought to what twenty-seven years of imprisonment would be like, but I knew I was not even twenty-seven years of age. I was a mere twenty-three, about to turn twenty-four and I couldn't comprehend an entire lifetime in prison.

Mr Mandela noticed that I was unable to continue our conversation and still held onto my hand as he put his left hand on my shoulder and tapped it while he said, 'It's OK, calm down, I think you are overreacting.' I was firstly not used to someone being so direct to me to tell me that I'm overreacting and, secondly, I was embarrassed that it was a President telling me this. I calmed down and he was obviously in a hurry so we parted. His last words were 'I am happy to meet you and hope to see you again.' As we parted I thought: Ye, right. How can I be important to a President? After all, it's my people

that put him through all that suffering.

I was in shock for the entire day and went home, telling my parents that I met the President today, and what a nice man he appeared to be. He spoke to me in Afrikaans. My parents didn't ask any questions and continued doing whatever they were busy with at the time, unaffected by my announcement. Probably used to me exaggerating a bit, I got the impression that they thought I was lying. I went to sleep puzzled by our encounter, not knowing where my thoughts or feelings were about this gentleman, perceived by my family and community to be a terrorist.

The next day I interrogated Mary about the fact that the President was so fluent in Afrikaans. She explained that he had learned Afrikaans in prison and he did so purposefully to communicate with his warders. It only struck me later that he obviously also charmed the apartheid leaders with his Afrikaans whenever he met them during negotiations. It is quite an amusing experience when events override what your brain expects. The last thing any Afrikaner would expect from Nelson Mandela was that he spoke to you in Afrikaans. It all became clear when he told me much later that, 'When you speak to a man you speak to his head but when you speak to him in his language you speak to his heart.' And that is exactly what he did. I came to understand that by learning the language of the warders he could almost seduce them. Afrikaans, being the language of the oppressor, was a much-hated language at the time and synonymous with the apartheid regime. I later also learned that Afrikaans was imposed as the main language for black education in 1974. This resulted in the Soweto uprising in 1976 in which about 20,000 black students took part, and although official figures estimated that the uprising resulted in 176 deaths it is widely believed that up to 700 students died during the protest. Black people were not accounted for in South Africa in those years and therefore official figures and estimates never correlated as there was no existing official register.

* * *

In the weeks that followed I saw the President at a distance on a few occasions as he passed in and out of the office. I concentrated on my typing and supporting Mary and never bothered to be around or be seen when he was in the office. Instead, I befriended the bodyguards, black and white. Some of them were very caring about me and

inquisitive about my background. I was never sure whether they were checking on me or not, asking questions out of pure interest or whether it was as part of their job to establish any threat I may pose to the President.

Every time the President passed my office, I ensured that my door was closed so as to avoid having another emotional interaction with him. I literally hid away when I heard him approaching and only saw his back as he was passing the office. I was happy with his presence in the office though, as it brought about some excitement and a list of interesting visitors. I was more intrigued by him than by the visitors and hardly took notice of them, apart from knowing that some of them had names I recognized from the media or magazines.

I do recall the newly crowned Miss South Africa visiting, Basetsana Makgalamela. I had some practice before she arrived in pronouncing her surname and managed by the time she arrived. She met with the President and we were called by Mary after the meeting to meet Miss South Africa.

Mary announced one afternoon that the President wished to see all his personal staff for lunch at his official residence the next day. Soon after his inauguration he renamed the Presidential house Mahlamba Ndlopfu, meaning 'start of a new dawn'. I thought that was quite appropriate. I was extremely nervous and definitely not ready to eat with any President. I had no idea what cutlery to use first, and one of my colleagues told me to simply watch her and follow her example, which put me at ease. I had also asked my mother the night before what to do about a selection of cutlery and she grabbed her Emsie Schoeman book – a South African lady who was considered the authority on etiquette – and I got a crash-course in table manners.

Arriving at Mahlamba Ndlopfu we were escorted to a sitting room. The President was still in a meeting but our arrival was announced to him. He ended his meeting and joined us in the lounge. He greeted us each by shaking hands and in a relaxing way conversing with us as a group, walking us to the dining room. By now I managed to control myself and I didn't cry. It was a kind gesture from his side to invite his staff to lunch, and looking at my colleagues it crossed my mind that the seven of us at that point were almost representative of all races in South Africa: Mary Mxadana, his private secretary, was black; Morris Chabalala, one of the assistant private secretaries, also black; Elize Wessels, the other assistant private secretary, white; Alan Pillay, the administrative officer, Indian; Lenois Coetzee, the receptionist, white;

Olga Tsoko, the other receptionist, black; and then me, the most junior in age and rank, white.

I was told that shortly after his inauguration the President called all the staff from the old Presidency, people who had served the previous regime, to a meeting, allaying their fears of being fired or made redundant without discussion or them having a choice in the matter. He asked people to stay and help build the new government of national unity but also gave them the option of leaving if they wished to move on. Staff greatly appreciated the President giving them a choice. The President's office was now a mixture of black and white people representing the 'Rainbow nation' he often referred to in speeches.

I'd noticed, too, that in Tuynhuys, the President's office in Cape Town situated next to Parliament, the pictures of the old Presidents and Prime Ministers continued to hang on the walls. Again I'd found it strange that he wouldn't erase the past, seeing as how these people had spearheaded the oppression of his people and imprisoned him. But I was told that President Mandela insisted that those not be removed. That they were part of South Africa's history, no matter how unpleasant the memories were.

At the lunch, a round table was set and I quickly chose a chair far from his to avoid any uncomfortable conversation or difficult questions from him, and I didn't want to take a chair of someone that wanted to sit next to him. It was 1 p.m. and instead of lunch, one of the housekeepers entered the room with a small FM black box-type radio. It looked like an antique and something that was not seen often being used any longer. It was time for the news and the radio was switched on and put on the window shelf. While the news was being read on radio we all looked at one another uncomfortably. The President listened with concentration, clearly taking seriously what was being read. I vaguely recall mention about South Africa acting as a peace-keeping force in Africa, the Achille Lauro sinking off the coast of Somalia and Cindy Crawford and Richard Gere announcing their separation. I was trying to concentrate on the news but my thoughts wandered about the President, what he felt and thought at that time and, most importantly, how he felt about the three white Afrikaners at his lunch table.

Following the news lunch was served. To the contrary of what I expected, lunch was simple. It consisted of a starter, main course, dessert and coffee. The food was home-cooked, without fanciness, and

you knew exactly what you were eating. The President had a glass of wine and even though we were all offered wine I settled for water. During lunch he started to tell us some stories about his years in prison and I had to press my fingernails into the palm of my hand to prevent me from crying again. By the time dessert was served I couldn't control myself any longer and my eyes were filled with tears. I felt so sorry for him. He told us about his precious tomato garden in prison and how he cherished his crop. He also explained how they worked in the limestone quarry, and how the reflection of the white rock damaged his eyes, and with his exceptional ability of story-telling he transported our imaginations to South Africa's Alcatraz and his prison cell on Robben Island. I tried to comprehend season upon season in a prison cell, cold cement floors, sharing a bathroom with other inmates, never having privacy, eating at specific times and limited tasteless food for twenty-seven years. It was still too much to comprehend. What struck me was that while he was telling these stories he didn't appear to be sad. To me it sounded like tragedy, yet he recited the stories in a colourful way as opposed to my grim imagination.

Lunch was soon over and back at the office we shared our experience with each other and I was free to express my sympathy. Clearly the President didn't want sympathy. It was something he considered to have been part of history and not to determine the rest of his life. I soon found a quote that expressed it so well: 'It's not important in life what happens to you, but how you handle what happens to you.'

I read later that he had written that it was easier to change others than to change himself, and to this day I often wonder about the struggle within himself as far as it concerned forgiveness and reconciliation, trying to imagine to what extent one has to really work with oneself to change your thinking and your beliefs: to take that decision to forgive, as Ahmed Kathrada told me. But as Madiba said, by deciding to forgive you do not only free the oppressed but you also free the oppressor.

* * *

Later that year, a prominent and progressive South African, Dr Johan Heyns, was assassinated and the President called all the generals in charge of the security forces in South Africa to a meeting in his office.

Dr Heyns was one of the senior leaders of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. The church was prominent during the apartheid era, justifying it through religion and Dr Heyns was one of the few Afrikaner leaders who criticized apartheid at a time when it was not fashionable to do so. Now it was suspected that a third force was at play, trying to destabilize the country and create tension between black and white at a time when South Africa was still vulnerable. As someone who had walked the Damascus road and showed eagerness to work with the new government, it was believed that Dr Heyns was assassinated by white Afrikaner extremists, the same kind of conservative people I once religiously supported. The conservative Afrikaners did not welcome such gestures of reform. I had slowly started to think about my own beliefs and although I was still a little confused, I had softened up and realized at least that resisting change was neither logical nor justifiable.

As the generals marched past my office to the President's office I couldn't help but feel a sense of pride when I saw them in their uniforms. We Afrikaners are proud people, especially of our generals and people who hold such positions – inherently so, but also because we trust them unconditionally and without prejudice. I felt proud of their presence even though there was tension in the office.

The President also called on General Constand Viljoen, who was the leader of the right-wing party called the Freedom Front and opposed to Mr Mandela on matters ranging from power sharing to land reform. I was extremely proud to meet General Viljoen as he was a pure Boer in every sense of the word (boer is Afrikaans for 'farmer'). He was also happy to find a girl in the President's office looking like and epitomizing a real Afrikaner. I imagined it made him feel comfortable seeing someone with the same culture and background in the President's office. The President didn't want to speak to him in his office, probably out of fear for listening devices, and met with him on a couch at the entrance of the ladies' bathroom in our offices across from my office door. When they sat down, the President called me. I was introduced to General Viljoen in Afrikaans and the President smiled warmly as he told General Viljoen that I was a real Afrikaner.

What did President Mandela mean when he said I was a 'real Afrikaner' or boere-meisie (farm girl)? Was it because I spoke Afrikaans? Did he sense I came from a conservative family? Or did I simply look like an Afrikaner? Only later I thought that perhaps my weight also played a part in epitomizing a real Afrikaner, something

about which I was quite sensitive at the time. The Afrikaners are generally largely built people with a bigger bone structure. Most of them, my family not excluded, love to eat, particularly bread and meat. Did Nelson Mandela think I was really the image of an Afrikaner farm girl?

I went home that night with the same pride to tell my parents that I had met General Viljoen. I still had no interest in politics and only knew that he was there to discuss the death of Dr Johan Heyns. My parents were visibly more impressed by this announcement as General Viljoen was seen to represent the conservative Afrikaners at the time. An intelligence report on the death of Dr Heyns later crossed my desk but I had no interest in reading it, much to my regret in later years.

As the year passed, I started to feel more at home in my new environment, keeping Mary up to date on security, briefing the airforce on the President's movements, working with his staff at the ANC. On Mondays the President spent the entire day at Shell House, as it was known, the ANC head office in Johannesburg (later the name was changed to Luthuli House, after the founding president of the ANC, Albert Luthuli). We were not allowed to interfere with Mondays and in five years, unless we were on travels abroad, the President didn't miss one Monday going to the ANC head offices. We never knew what he did there or who he interacted with, and his party political work was separated from his official duties as President. But he was part and parcel of the ANC, never to be divorced from the party that shaped his life and entire political career and in the execution of his daily tasks as President he honoured the ANC's policies and framework.

Then one day I received a call from Mary to say that the President wanted me to drive to his private house in Houghton, Johannesburg, to help him with some Afrikaans. He was having trouble with his eye following an operation on it and we were told that he would be at home recovering for a few days.

Upon arrival at his Houghton house, I found a few security vehicles parked outside. The President himself was seated in a comfortable chair outside in the garden under a tree. He was wearing sunglasses with his two feet raised on a foot rest. He was wearing sunglasses obviously to protect his recovering eye. We shook hands and greeted warmly. He asked me to take a seat next to him and handed me the Beeld newspaper (the Afrikaans daily newspaper in our area). He then instructed me to start reading to him. Panic struck, I

think I thought for a moment that I had forgotten how to read.

I struggled until he stopped me and told me to relax. There was humour in his voice and he told me to start from the top and read at a slower pace. It was easier. I then came across the surname Mamoepa in the article. Ronnie Mamoepa was the spokesperson for the ANC at the time. Reading across the surname I pronounced it exactly as it is spelt. The President interrupted me. He corrected my pronunciation to Mamo-epa. I thanked him and continued reading. Coming across the next mention of Ronnie's surname I tried to pass it as quickly as possible but the President interrupted me again and corrected me patiently, prompting me to repeat after him. The third time I realized I had to pay attention and that he was not going to be amused by my lack of trying, so I did and when I crossed the name for the fourth time he congratulated me on my good pronunciation. I felt like I had won an Olympic Gold medal and was almost embarrassed by the fuss he made. I relaxed a little but was still very tense. I also read too fast and he told me a few times to slow down. It was pure tension. He then asked me to explain a term he didn't understand and I read the sentence again and explained the context. After reading a few more articles I was dismissed to return to Pretoria. I remember perspiring like a marathon runner from pure nerves and was happy to be back at home, recovering from another shock interaction.

* * *

We returned to business as usual and the next time the President was in the office it was easier to face him. I didn't have any business dealing with him directly but now and then I would walk into him in the corridors or see him passing my office. I was no longer hiding or feeling shy and accepted the fact that if he wanted to get rid of me because I was a white Afrikaner, I would just deal with it when it happened. For the time being it appeared as if I was not going to become a victim of such actions, and although still somewhat sceptical about his feelings towards whites, I took comfort in the fact that he had only shown warmth so far.

I was trying to get an understanding of the political world around me. It wasn't easy and I literally had to do a crash-course in South African history. One of the bodyguards offered to take me and my two best friends, Pieter Moolman and Andries Ellis, to Soweto on a tour. Soweto is a formerly black township on the outskirts of Johannesburg,

where the black people were grouped together and restricted to live in, during apartheid. We were nervous and scared but also curious to see what it looked like.

The bodyguard took us to President Mandela's first house in Vilakazi Street, showed us where Archbishop Tutu stayed – in the same street – and the Hector Pieterson museum, and related the stories of the student uprising in 1976. Hector was a child of thirteen years of age participating in the uprising in 1976 when thousands of students marched against Afrikaans being made compulsory as the medium of education for black people. The march was intended to be a peaceful demonstration but turned violent when the police arrived and shot at students to disperse the crowds. Hector was shot, and an iconic image taken of another student carrying him and running from the scene while Hector was dying in his arms became the image the world saw of South Africa under apartheid law. Hector was a hero.

The police officer taking us on the tour showed us some spots that were used as hideouts in Soweto by the ANC and its military wing when they were operating underground, and we were excited to learn but nervous at the same time for being in Soweto. White people didn't easily go into Soweto at the time but I was at ease as he was armed and I knew he would be in trouble if while in the care of a bodyguard of the President something had happened to us in Soweto. We drove around for a while and saw that Soweto was not the township of squatter camps like slums I had imagined it to be. People were building proper houses, some of them mansions, and there was nothing visibly to be afraid of. I later learned that the gentleman who took us on the tour was closely linked to National Intelligence, and I often thought that he was probably only eager to take us on the tour to enable him to dig a little into our lives and assess us on a threat level, as my presence so close to the President warranted.

At the end of 1994 the President went on holiday to Saudi Arabia. I couldn't imagine why anyone would want to go to Saudi Arabia on holiday. I was told the President visited a hospital while he was there, meeting with some South African nurses, and that he had friends there too, but I couldn't comprehend how one has a holiday in a desert like Saudi Arabia.

On the day of the President's return from Saudi, Mary invited me to accompany her to the airport to go and meet him. I was so excited and jumped at the opportunity. By now my attitude towards him had changed. His interactions with me were always pleasant and he was

very friendly and warm whenever he spoke to me. I was therefore looking forward to any opportunity to see him. Mary said I had to bring my telephone book in case he wanted to make any calls from the airport, which he then did. By then I had armed myself with a telephone book and any numbers that Mary or the President could need. It was not something she told me to do but I assumed to be effective one had to have certain information at hand at all times, so I started compiling a telephone book with the important numbers Mary frequently used.

Arriving at the airport the President appeared happy to see me and he said that he'd thought about me. Again I thought: Ye right. I'm sure a President has more important things to think about than a typist in his office. Later I realized that he had already probably started working on his strategy to use me as the perfect example of including an Afrikaner in his office and how minorities would react to him doing so. It didn't cross my mind at the time though and although what he said flattered me I did not really believe it.

A huge media contingent awaited the President's arrival at Waterkloof airforce base where the Presidential plane touched down. Just after he greeted me someone took a photo of him and Mary walking towards the VIP arrivals hall at Waterkloof. The photo appeared in the Sunday Times newspaper the next day and my dad telephoned the newspaper to have a copy of the original photo sent to him. To my surprise they also took a photo while I greeted the President. It was my most precious possession ever when I received the photo and by now I was noticing some pride in my father, regardless of the fact that he had not met President Mandela but was merely creating an opinion based on the stories I told at home about our few interactions. Nelson Mandela was changing South Africans' views one by one. My dad included.

DEEL TWEE

’n Nuwe dagbreek

1994–1999

3

Ek ontmoet meneer Mandela

Kort ná die verkiesing in 1994 moes die inkomende regering nuwe mense aanstel. Die afdeling by my departement moes help met die enorme taak om die apartheidsregering in iets 'meer verteenwoordigend' om te skakel. Met ander woorde, ons moes meer swart mense aanstel. Dit was die begin van transformasie. Suid-Afrika sou vir almal regeer word. Almal sou verteenwoordig word.

Derduisende mense het aansoek gedoen. Dit het ons weke geneem om kortlyste vir die geadverteerde poste saam te stel. Daar was duidelik 'n groot tekort aan bedrewe mense, maar daar was inderdaad mense in Suid-Afrika wat desperaat werk gesoek het. Ongeletterdheid onder baie aansoekers het beteken dat hulle nie oorweeg sou kon word nie. Dié mense is nie onder apartheid die kans gegee om 'n ordentlike skoolopleiding te kry nie. Ek het hard geswoeg om al die aansoeke te verwerk. Daar was geen aansporing om dit te doen nie, maar dis in my aard om enige taak wat ek het so gou as moontlik af te handel. Ek is een van daardie mense wat 'n ding in my kop moet 'afteken' en soms vinniger werk as wat die taak vereis. Ek het 'n nuwe werk gesoek; ek wou van voor af begin, weg van my verbreekte verlowing, maar in die tussentyd het ek daarop gefokus om die aansoeke te verwerk.

Dit was toe dat 'n kollega my van 'n tiksterpos in 'n administratiewe afdeling van die nuut gestigte presidentskantoor vertel het. Die een wat die werk kry, sou sessiediens doen: ses maande van die jaar in Pretoria en ses maande in Kaapstad. Met die parlementsitting het politici, hul gesinne en ondersteunende personeel in Kaapstad gewerk en gewoon, want dit is waar die parlement is. Tydens die parlementêre reses het almal na Pretoria, die administratiewe hoofstad, teruggetrek. Dit was iets waarvan ek altyd gedroom het en

die feit dat die werk op ’n laer posvlak was as die een waarin ek my bevind het, het my nie gepla nie. Wat die pos aantrekliker gemaak het, is dat dit vir die minister sonder portefeulje geadverteer is, en ek het gereken iemand sonder portefeulje sou nie baie besig wees nie en dat ek nie baie hard vir hom sou hoef te werk nie. Later het ek natuurlik uitgevind dat die term verwys daarna dat die betrokke minister, soos benodig, by allerlei sake betrek kon word, en dat hy dus nie ’n vaste portefeulje of agenda gehad het waarna hy moes omsien nie.

Ek het die saak kort daarna in my eie departement bespreek en my seniors ingelig dat ek wil aansoek doen om die pos, mits ek op dieselfde salarisskaal kon bly as my aansoek suksesvol sou wees. Hulle het ingestem.

My onderhoud is in die Uniegebou gevoer. Nie net het ek nie meer op die gras voor dié gebou rondgerol nie, daar was ook ’n swart man in die pos met die meeste mag in die land. En hy het seker gemaak dat mense soos ek, konserwatiewe wit Afrikaners, by die nuwe regering ingesluit word. Mense was vriendelik en ontspanne en ek het baie wit gesigte gesien, al was die ANC-regering aan bewind.

Tydens die onderhoud het ’n swart dame ingestap. Sy het vrolik en flambojant gelyk. Sy was uitgedos in ’n kleurryke satynuitrusting en dit was ’n prentjie waaraan ek nie gewoond was nie – dié van ’n swart vrou wat so stylvol aangetrek is en in iets wat duidelik baie duurder was as my ma se waardevolste uitrusting. Sy het die onderhoud onbeleef onderbreek en vir die onderhoudvoerders gesê: ‘Ek het ’n tikster nodig en ek gee nie om of sy wit of swart is nie, en ek het haar nóú nodig.’ Ek het geglimlag en gedink: Ek is die een wat jy wil hê. Ek het geen idee gehad van die rol wat die suksesvolle kandidaat sou vervul nie. Die vrou het ’n kort gesprek met die onderhoudvoerders gevoer en toe uitgestap. My onderhoudvoerders het my twee uur later gebel en gevra of ek dalk belang sou stel in die pos. Ek het my oog op Kaapstad gehad, en omdat hulle my verseker het die voorwaardes was dieselfde as dié van die pos waarom ek aansoek gedoen het, het ek gesê dat ek daarin belangstel.

Hulle het gesê die vrou wat by my onderhoud ingestap het, was die president se private sekretaresse. Ek het verstaan dat ek vir haar, Mary Mxadana, sou werk en sy het heel gaaf gelyk. Terwyl ek nog in die

departement van staatsbesteding gewerk het, moes ek twee swart junior amptenare oplei wat ná die begin van die transformasieproses by ons aangesluit het. Hulle het vriendelik gelyk en ons het goed saamgewerk. Stadig maar seker het ek met ander oë na swart mense begin kyk. Ek was nie meer vanselfsprekend bang vir almal nie. Ek het gewoonweg met hulle begin praat, sonder dat ek dink hulle sou net gebroke Afrikaans en Engels verstaan. Mary was vriendelik en het my gemaklik laat voel, al was daar by my nog twyfel.

Ek het besef ek sou in ’n kantoor werk wat nader was aan die politieke kern van idees waarteen ek nog gekant was, maar ek het gedink dis net ’n werk en ek sou nie veel met regte politiek te doen kry nie. Ek was gewillig om ’n middeweg te kies, en teen daardie tyd het ek al begin dink ek hou dalk van doktor Mangosuthu Buthelezi, die leier van die Inkatha Vryheidsparty, die ANC se opposisie. Ek het van hom gehou nadat ek hom op televisie gesien het, en ek het gereken as ek my siening oor hom kon verander, was Nelson Mandela dalk ook nie so erg nie. Ek was bereid om die werk ’n kans te gee en ek het geweet dat niks my sou keer om te bedank as ek nie daarvan hou nie.

Ek kan nie onthou dat ek enigiets anders as verlig was toe ek die pos kry nie. Twee weke ná die onderhoud het ek as senior ministeriële tikster in die presidentskantoor begin werk.

Op 12 Oktober 1994 het ek by die Uniegebou ingestap as werknemer van president Mandela se persoonlike kantoor. Ek het oral foto’s van hom gesien, maar niks van hom geweet nie, behalwe dat hy lank op Robbeneiland aangehou is en dat my huisgesin hom as ’n terroris beskou het. Ek het nie gedink daar sou enige interaksie tussen ons wees, of selfs dat ek hom ooit sou sien nie.

Ek het vroeg opgedaag en ’n ander personeellid het my by ontvangs kom haal en deur ’n hele paar glasdeure en veiligheidsbeheerpunte gelei tot by ’n plek wat as die presidentsuite bekend was. Dit het bestaan uit ’n paar kantore in ’n gang af. Sy het my lessenaar en rekenaar aan my uitgewys. Dit het soos ’n oopplankantoor gelyk, maar haar lessenaar was die enigste ander een daar. Sy was ’n administrateur wat die presidentskantoor se private skakelbord beman en allerlei administratiewe takies behartig het, soos benodig.

Sy het aan my verduidelik dat net sy, Mary en Elize Wessels in die

presidentskantoor werksaam was. Elize was vroeër aan F.W. de Klerk se regering verbonde en het vir sy vrou, Marike, gewerk.

Ek het spanning tussen die 'ou' wit personeel en 'nuwe' swart personeel aangevoel. Mense was nog besig om hul kleim af te steek vir poste in die nuwe regering. Dit was duidelik dat die 'ou' garde se rol was om die nuwe regering te help om geleidelik gesag oor te neem, om hulle te lei en te leer, of hulle dit nou wou doen of nie.

Mary het eers heelwat later by die kantoor opgedaag. 'n Mens kon haar teenwoordigheid sterk aanvoel, selfs al sou jy haar nie dadelik opmerk nie. Sy het gesag afgedwing en kleurryk aangetrek, wat by haar lewendige geaardheid gepas het. Sy het soos 'n warrelwind by die kan toor ingewaai en my 'n drukkie gegee om my te verwelkom. Sy was baie vriendelik en het my op my gemak laat voel. Aangesien ek toe nog nooit vir 'n swart mens gewerk het nie, was ek in die begin versigtig. Daar was 'n oppervlakkige vertroue tussen wit en swart. Ons het nog steeds nie geweet wat om van mekaar te verwag nie. Ek was bereid om vir haar te werk, maar ek het aan my politieke standpunte vasgeklou, met die gedagte dat my praktiese en geldelike omstandighede my gedwing het om in dié kantoor te werk.

Alle Afrikaners voel nie noodwendig so nie, maar oor die algemeen gesproke het ons respek vir mense in magsposisies en vir ouer mense. Of ons met hul politiek saamstem of nie, ons tree hoflik teenoor hulle op. As jou beginsels jou verhinder om respek vir iemand te hê, bly jy eenvoudig uit hul pad. Ek het gevind ek het respek vir Mary. Sy het my van die vryheidstryd vertel. Die geskiedenis van my eie land het my begin boei. Ek het gevoel asof ek van 'n ander planeet af kom omdat ek geheel en al onbewus was van die dinge wat sy my vertel het. Miskien was dit juis my onskuld en onkunde wat haar gemaklik by my laat voel het. Sy was baie warm en vriendelik teenoor my en ons het 'n passie vir musiek gedeel. Sy het my van haar koor vertel en 'n CD saamgebring waarna ek kon luister. Haar man was die koorleier en sy was een van die stigterslede. Hulle het soos engele gesing.

In die volgende twee weke is ek beter ingelig oor die manier waarop die presidentskantoor werk. Die president self was nêrens te sien of te hoor nie en ek het begin aanvaar dat ek hom dalk eendag op 'n afstand sou sien, maar ek het 'n hele klomp mense ontmoet, van Parks Mankahlana, die president se woordvoerder, tot Tony Trew, wat

gehelp het om van die president se toesprake te skryf, tot ons kantoorhoof, professor Jakes Gerwel, na wie as die direkteur-generaal van die presidensie verwys is. Dit het my ’n rukkie geneem om uit te werk wie doen wat en om almal se name te onthou.

My vernaamste taak was om Mary se tikwerk te doen en die president se program gereeld op datum te bring. Sy het my vinnig geleer hoe om die program aan die president se veiligheidspersoneel te versprei en sy het gesê ek moes seker maak die wit en swart bevelvoerders van sy veiligheidspan kry die program gelyktydig. Die Suid-Afrikaanse Polisiediens was ook besig met ’n transformasieproses, soos al die ander regeringsdepartemente, en moes met die ANC se militêre vleuel, Umkhonto we Sizwe, saamsmelt. Apla en Azapo, ander deelnemers aan die vryheidstryd, moes ook betrek word by die polisiemag, wat voorheen deur wit mense oorheers is. Alles het nie dadelik vir my sin gemaak nie. Ek moes dieselfde faks na dieselfde nommer stuur, maar vir die aandag van verskilende mense merk. Dit was duidelik ’n kosmetiese inskakeling by die polisiemag en die twee partye het tot ’n groot mate onafhanklik opgetree, en steeds probeer om vertroue by mekaar te kweek. Maar ek is iemand wat volgens die reëls optree. Wanneer daar bevele uitgedeel word, volg ek hulle tot in die fynste besonderhede en ek het dit gedoen sonder om te vra of dit prakties is of daarteen te redeneer.

Omtrent twee weke ná my aankoms by die presidensie het ons gehoor die president gaan vir die eerste keer op kantoor wees. Teen dié tyd het Mary my al ’n bietjie van die president vertel, die soort mens wat hy was, en dat hy goedhartig en gedissiplineerd was. Meeste Afrikaners word grootgemaak om respek te hê vir mense in gesagsposisies, en ek het respek vir hom gehad nog voordat ek hom ontmoet het, bloot omdat hy die president van die land was. Hy het niks in die openbaar gedoen wat my nog anders sou laat dink nie, en daarom het ek geen rede gehad om nié respek vir hom te hê nie.

Vandat ek daardie oggend vroeg by die kantoor ingestap het, kon ek ’n ongewone spanning in die gebou aanvoel, maar ook ’n opgewondenheid. Die polisie wat wag hou oor ons kantoor was op en wakker en hulle uniforms was netjies gestryk, en kort daarna het ’n span mans in donker pakke aangekom en gesê hulle is die voorspan van die president se lyfwagte. En toe was dit tyd vir die president se

aankoms. Ek het die deur toegemaak wat na my kantoor lei om te verseker dat niks wat in die gang gebeur, versteur sou word nie. Aan die verbygaande voeteval en kabaal het ek geweet die president het aangekom en hy het by my kantoor verbygestap, in die gang af, tot by sy kantoor. Gaste het aangekom om hom te spreek en is sonder oponthoud na sy kantoor toe geneem. Alles het stiptelik plaasgevind en is op die korrekte manier uitgevoer. Ek het stil op my stoel gesit en vir opdragte gewag. Ek het gesien die lyfwagte is almal gewapen en ek was gespanne en versigtig. Ek wou seker maak ek voer geen skielike beweging uit wat verkeerd vertolk kon word nie. Dit was die eerste keer dat ek gewapende mense so naby aan my gehad het en dit het my senuweeagtig gemaak.

’n Paar uur later het Mary my gevra om iets te tik en na haar kantoor te bring sodra ek klaar is. Dis wat ek gedoen het, en ek het nog na die vel papier in my hand gekyk, toe ek amper in president Mandela vasloop terwyl hy by Mary se kantoor uitstap gang toe, omring deur lyfwagte. Hy het eerste sy hand na my uitgesteek om my te groet. Ek was verward en ek het nie geweet of dit gepas sou wees om met hom te praat nie. ‘Goeiemôre, meneer Mandela,’ het ek op Engels gesê. Op daardie oomblik weet ’n mens nie wat om te doen anders as om in trane uit te bars nie. En dit was toe wat ek gedoen het. Alles was net een te veel. Ek het begin snik. Hy het met my gepraat, maar ek het nie verstaan wat hy sê nie. Ek was geskok. Ek moes sê: ‘Ekskuus tog, Meneer die President,’ sodat hy kon herhaal wat hy vir my gesê het. Nadat ek my gedagtes – of my maag, ek is nie seker watter een nie – tot bedaring gebring het, het ek besef hy praat Afrikaans met my. My huistaal.

Hy was duidelik oud en het saggeaard gelyk. Ek het op sy plooie en sy warm, opregte glimlag gefokus. Dis het geklink asof hy rêrig wou weet toe hy my naam vra. Ek wou my hand terugtrek nadat ek syne geskud het, maar hy het nie laat los nie. Ek kon die tekstuur van sy hand teen myne voel en ek het begin sweet. Ek was nie seker of ek veronderstel was om hierdie swart man se hand vas te hou nie. Ek wou gehad het hy moet myne los, maar hy het nie en het gevra waar ek vandaan kom en waar ek werk. Ek het nie geweet of ek Afrikaans of Engels moes praat nie en ek kan nie onthou watter een ek gekies het nie, maar ons het in ’n mengsel van die twee met mekaar gepraat.

Emosie het my oorval en ek kon nie aangaan nie. Dit was toe dat ’n skuldgevoel my tref. Ek het sleg gevoel dat hierdie saggeaarde man met die sagmoedige oë en die ruim hart met my in my eie taal gepraat het, en dit nadat ‘my mense’ hom vir soveel jare tronk toe gestuur het. Ek het dadelik berou gehad omdat ek ‘nee’ gestem het in die referendum. Hoe kan ek al hierdie vooroordeel binne vyf minute regstel? Skielik wou ek net om verskoning vra. Ek het nooit gewonder hoe sewe-en-twintig jaar in die tronk moes voel nie, maar ek was nog nie eers sewe-en-twintig jaar oud nie. Ek was net drie-en-twintig, met my vier-en-twintigste verjaardag om die draai, en ’n hele leeftyd in die tronk was vir my ondenkbaar.

President Mandela het gesien ek kon nie verder praat nie, en terwyl hy steeds my hand vashou, het hy liggies met sy linkerhand op my skouer getik en gesê: ‘Toemaar nou, ek dink jy oorreageer.’ In die eerste plek was ek nie gewoond daaraan dat iemand so reguit vir my sê ek oorreageer nie, en tweedens was ek verleë dat dit ’n president was wat dit vir my sê. Ek het kalmer geword. Hy was duidelik haastig en ons het uiteengegaan. Sy laaste woorde aan my was: ‘Ek is bly ons het ontmoet en ek hoop ek sien jou weer.’ Toe hy wegstap, het ek gedink: Ja, ja. Hoe kan ’n president dink ek is belangrik? En dit is immers my mense wat hom soveel leed aangedoen het.

Die skok het my die hele dag bygebly en ek het huis toe gegaan en my ouers vertel ek het die president ontmoet en hoe gaaf hy vir my lyk. Hy het Afrikaans met my gepraat. My ouers het my nie uitgevra nie en net aangegaan met dit waarmee hulle besig was, onaangeraak deur my aankondiging. Hulle was seker maar gewoond daaraan dat ek effens oordryf en ek het die gevoel gekry hulle dink ek jok. Ek het gaan slaap, steeds in die war oor my ontmoeting met die president, en het nie geweet wat ek dink en hoe ek voel oor hierdie gawe man wat deur my ouers en gemeenskap as ’n terroris beskou word nie.

Ek het Mary die volgende dag uitgevra oor die president se vlot Afrikaans. Sy het verduidelik dat hy doelbewus Afrikaans in die tronk geleer het sodat hy beter met sy bewaarders kon kommunikeer. Dit het my eers later getref dat hy sekerlik ook die apartheidleiers met sy Afrikaans sou beïndruk wanneer hy hulle vir samesprekings ontmoet het. Dis nogal ’n lagwekkende ervaring wanneer gebeure ’n mens se verwagtinge uit die pad vee. Die laaste ding wat ’n Afrikaner van

Nelson Mandela sou verwag, was dat hy jou in Afrikaans sou aanspreek. Alles het vir my duidelik geword toe hy heelwat later vir my gesê het: 'Wanneer jy met 'n man praat, praat jy met sy kop, maar wanneer jy met hom in sy eie taal praat, praat jy met sy hart.' En dis presies wat hy gedoen het. Ek het verstaan dat hy sy bewaarders amper kon beswymel deurdat hy hulle taal kon praat. Afrikaans, as die taal van die onderdrukker, is destyds oral verfoei en was sinoniem met die apartheidsregering. Ek sou ook later hoor dat Afrikaans in 1976 as amptelike onderrigtaal op swart skole afgedwing is. Dit het tot die Soweto-opstand gelei waaraan sowat twintigduisend leerlinge deelgeneem het, en hoewel die amptelike dodetal op honderd-ses-en-sewentig staan, is daar baie mense wat meen tot so veel as sewehonderd leerlinge is dood. Daar is nie destyds van swart mense rekord gehou nie en daarom klop amptelike syfers en skattings feitlik nooit. Daar bestaan nie 'n amptelike register nie.

In die weke ná ons ontmoeting het ek die president 'n paar keer op 'n afstand gesien wanneer hy in en uit by sy kantoor is. Ek het op my tikwerk gekonsentreer en Mary bygestaan en nooit moeite gedoen om naby hom te kom of om deur hom opgemerk te word nie. Pleks daarvan het ek met die lyfwagte vriende gemaak, swart en wit. Party van hulle het hulle oor my ontferm en was nuuskierig oor my agtergrond. Ek was nooit seker of hulle my dophou of nie; of hulle uit blote belangstelling vrae vra, en of hulle as deel van hul werk wou seker maak ek hou nie 'n bedreiging vir die president se veiligheid in nie.

Elke keer wanneer die president by my kantoor verbygestap het, het ek seker gemaak my deur is toe, asof ek nog 'n emosionele ontmoeting met hom wou vermy. Ek het letterlik weggekruip wanneer ek hom hoor aankom en net sy rug gesien wanneer hy verby my kantoor loop. Ek was wel bly wanneer hy op kantoor was, want dit het 'n bietjie opwinding en besoeke van interessante mense verseker. Hy was vir my meer boeiend as sy besoekers. Ek het hulle nie altyd opgemerk nie. Ek het net geweet ek het party van hulle se name al in die media of tydskrifte gesien.

Ek onthou wel 'n besoek van Basetsana Makgalemele, wat toe pas as Mejuffou Suid-Afrika gekroon is. Ek het voor die tyd geoefen om haar van reg uit te spreek en teen die tyd dat sy by ons aangekom het, was

ek gereed. Sy het met die president gaan praat en toe sy klaar was, het Mary ons kom roep sodat ons haar ook kon ontmoet.

Mary het een middag aangekondig dat die president al sy persoonlike personeel die volgende dag by sy ampswoning wou ontvang vir middagete. Kort na sy inhuldiging het hy die presidensiële woning tot Mahlamba Ndlopfu herdoop, wat 'die begin van 'n nuwe dagbreek' beteken. Ek het gedink dis heel toepaslik. Ek was uiters senuweeagtig en beslis nie gereed om saam met enige president te eet nie. Ek het geen idee gehad watter eetgerei om eerste te gebruik nie, en een van my kollegas het gesê ek moet haar net dophou en haar voorbeeld volg, wat my gemakliker laat voel het. Ek het my ma ook die aand voor die ete gevra hoe kies mens uit 'n stel messe en vurke langs jou bord. Sy het 'n boek van Emsie Schoeman, 'n etiket-deskundige, nadergetrek en ek het 'n kitsles in tafelmaniere gekry. Met ons aankoms by Mahlamba Ndlopfu is ons na 'n sitkamer gelei. Die president was nog in 'n vergadering, maar iemand het vir hom gesê ons het opgedaag. Hy het sy vergadering afgesluit en hom by ons in die sitkamer kom aansluit. Hy het ons gegroet deur elkeen van ons se hand te skud en heel ontspanne met die groep gesels, en daarna saam met ons na die eetkamer toe gestap. Teen dié tyd het ek al geleer om myself in te hou en ek het nie gehuil nie. Dit was gaaf van hom om sy personeel vir middagete te nooi en toe ek na my kollegas kyk, het dit by my opgekom dat die sewe van ons feitlik al die rasse in die land verteenwoordig. Mary Mxadana, sy private sekretaresse, is swart; Morris Tshabalala, een van die assistent- private sekretarisse, is ook swart; Elize Wessels, assistent- private sekretaresse, is wit, Alan Pillay, administratiewe beampte, was 'n Indiër; Lanois Coetzee by ontvangs is wit; Olga Tsoko, ook by ontvangs, is swart; en dan ek, die mees junior wat ouderdom en rang betref, ook wit.

Ek het verneem die president het kort ná sy inhuldiging al die personeellede van die ou presidensie wat vir die vorige regering gewerk het vir 'n vergadering ingeroep om hul vrese te besweer dat hulle dalk afgedank of oortollig verklaar sou word, sonder dat die saak met hulle bespreek is en sonder dat hulle self daaroor kon besluit. Hy het hulle gevra om te bly en aan die Regering van Nasionale Eenheid te help bou, maar gesê hulle kan aanbeweeg as hulle wou. Die personeel het hierdie keuse baie waardeer. Die presidentskantoor was

nou ’n mengsel van swart en wit, wat die ‘reënboognasie’ waarna hy so baie in sy toesprake verwys het, verteenwoordig.

Ek het ook opgemerk dat die foto’s van oudpresidente en voormalige eerste ministers steeds in Tuynhuys, die presidentskantoor in Kaapstad, teen die mure hang. Ek het dit weer vreemd gevind dat hy nie probeer het om die verlede uit te wis nie. Hierdie mense was immers aan die voorpunt van die onderdrukking van sy mense, en hulle het hom tronk toe gestuur. Maar president Mandela het vasgestaan dat die foto’s moes bly. Hulle was deel van Suid-Afrika se geskiedenis, maak nie saak hoe onaangenaam die herinneringe was nie.

Vir die ete is ’n ronde tafel gedek en ek het vinnig ’n stoel ver van syne af gekies om enige ongemaklike gesprekke of moeilike vrae van sy kant af te vermy, en ek wou ook nie ’n stoel vat van iemand wat graag langs hom wou sit nie. Dit was eenuur, en pleks van middagete het een van die huishoudsters ingekom met ’n klein swart FM-radio. Dit het soos ’n antieke stuk gelyk; die tipe ding wat teen daardie tyd nie meer baie gebruik is nie. Dit was nuustyd en die radio is aangeskakel en op die vensterbank neergesit. Terwyl die nuus gelees is, het ons ongemaklik na mekaar gekyk. Die president het met aandag geluister en dit wat gelees is duidelik in ’n ernstige lig beskou. Ek kan vaagweg iets onthou van Suid-Afrika wat as ’n vredesmag in Afrika sou optree; die Achille Lauro wat aan die Somaliese kus gesink het en Cindy Crawford en Richard Gere wat aangekondig het hul paaie gaan skei. Ek het op die nuus probeer fokus, maar my gedagtes was by die president, hoe hy op daardie oomblik voel en waaraan hy dink, en die heel belangrikste, hoe hy oor die drie Afrikaners voel wat saam met hom vir middagete aangesit het.

Ná die nuus is middagete bedien. Anders as wat ek verwag het, was die ete eenvoudig. Daar was ’n voorgereg, hoofgereg, nagereg en koffie. Die kos was soos dié wat ’n mens by jou huis sou kook – niks buitengewoon nie, en jy het geweet presies wat jy eet. Die president het ’n glasie wyn geniet en dis vir ons ook aangebied, maar ek het net water gedrink. Tydens die ete het hy vir ons staaltjies van sy dae in die tronk vertel en ek moes my naels in my handpalms druk om te keer dat ek weer in trane uitbars. Teen die tyd dat die nagereg bedien is, kon ek myself nie meer beheer nie en daar het trane in my oë

opgewel. Ek was só jammer vir hom. Hy het ons van sy kosbare tamatietuintjie in die tronk vertel en hoeveel sy oes vir hom beteken het. Hy het ook verduidelik hoe hulle in die kalksteengroef moes werk, en hoe die weerkaatsing van die son op die wit rotse sy oë beskadig het. Hy was 'n wonderlike storieverteller en ons kon ons verbeel hoe die lewe op Suid-Afrika se Alcatraz en in sy tronksel op Robbeneiland was. Ek het my probeer indink hoe dit voel om die een seisoen na die ander in 'n tronksel met koue betonvloere deur te bring; om'n badkamer met ander gevangenes te deel; om geen privaatheid te hê nie; om vaal, vervelige kos op spesifieke tye te eet, sewe-en-twintig jaar lank. Sover ek kon sien, was hy nie hartseer terwyl hy hierdie stories vertel nie. Vir my het dit soos 'n tragedie geklink, maar hy het dit op 'n kleurryke manier vertel, die teenoorgestelde van die prentjie in my somber verbeelding.

Ná die ete is ons terug kantoor toe, waar ons gesels het oor ons ervaring by die president se huis, en ek kon openlik sê hoe jammer ek hom kry. Enigeen kon sien die president wou nie simpatie hê nie. Dit was iets wat hy as deel van sy geskiedenis gesien het en hy sou nie toelaat dat dit die verloop van die res van sy lewe bepaal nie. Ek het kort daarna op 'n aanhaling afgekom wat dit baie goed uitgedruk het: 'Dis nie belangrik wat met jou gebeur nie, maar hoe jy daardie gebeure hanteer.'

Ek het later gelees Madiba het geskryf dit was makliker om ander mense te verander as om homself te verander, en tot vandag toe wonder ek oor sy stryd met homself oor vergifnis en versoening. Ek probeer my indink hoe 'n mens regtig aan jouself moet werk om jou denke en sienings te verander: om daardie besluit te neem om te vergewe, soos Ahmed Kathrada vir my gesê het. Madiba het dit só gestel: Wanneer jy besluit om te vergewe, laat jy nie net die onderdrukte vry nie, maar ook die onderdrukker.

Later daardie jaar is doktor Johan Heyns, 'n belangrike Afrikanerleier wat teen apartheid gekant was, vermoor en die president het al die generaals in beheer van die veiligheidsmagte vir 'n vergadering na sy kantoor ontbied. Heyns was die moderator van die algemene sinode van die Nederduits-Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika. Die kerk was magtig en het godsdiens gebruik om apartheid goed te praat. Heyns was een van die min Afrikanerleiers wat bereid was om hom teen

apartheid uit te spreek op ’n tyd toe min mense dit sou waag. Daar is vermoed dat die moord op hom die werk was van mense wat spanning tussen wit en swart wou aanblaas en die land van koers af wou stuur voor die nuwe regering gevestig kon word. As iemand wat gesien het apartheid was verkeerd en wat graag met die nuwe regering wou saamwerk, kon Heyns moontlik ’n teiken vir wit Afrikaner-ekstremiste gewees het; dieselfde soort konserwatiewe mense wat ek in die verlede met my hele hart ondersteun het. Konserwatiewe Afrikaners wou nie die veranderings in die land aanvaar nie. Ek het stadigaan oor my eie waardes begin nadink, en al was ek onseker, het ek skiet gegee en besef dis nie logies of sinvol om teen verandering vas te skop nie.

Toe die generaals in hul uniforms verby my kantoor stap op pad na die president s’n, kon ek nie help om trots te voel nie. Ons Afrikaners is trotse mense, veral op ons generaals en mense in sulke hoë posisies. Dis ingebore, maar ons het hulle ook vertrou sonder om vrae te vra en sonder vooroordeel. Ek was trots op hul teenwoordigheid, al was daar spanning in die kantoor.

Die president het ook vir generaal Constand Viljoen laat kom. Hy was die leier van die Vryheidsfront, ’n regse party wat president Mandela teengestaan het oor sake soos magsdeling en grondhervorming. Ek was baie trots toe ek Viljoen ontmoet het. Hy was pure Boer in elke sin van die woord (Afrikaner en plaasboer). Hy was ook bly om ’n meisie in die presidentskantoor teë te kom wat soos die toonbeeld van ’n ware Afrikanermeisie lyk. Ek het my verbeel iemand met dieselfde kultuur en agtergrond in die presidentskantoor sou hom op sy gemak laat voel. Die president wou nie in sy kantoor met die generaal praat nie, dalk omdat hy gedink het daar kon meeluisterapparaat wees, en het met hom op ’n rusbank voor die ingang van die vrouekleedkamer in ons kantoor gesels. Nadat hulle gaan sit het, het die president my geroep. Ek is op Afrikaans aan Viljoen voorgestel en die president het met ’n warm glimlag op sy gesig gesê ek is ’n regte Boeremeisie.

Wat het president Mandela daarmee bedoel? Was dit omdat ek Afrikaans praat? Of het hy aangevoel ek kom uit ’n konserwatiewe gesin? Of het ek maar net soos ’n Afrikaner gelyk? Ek het eers later gedink my gewig kon my dalk soos ’n tipiese Afrikanervrou laat lyk. Dit was toe nogal vir my ’n teer puntjie. Afrikaners is meestal nogal

groot gebou, met ’n beenstruktuur wat groter is as dié van baie ander groepe. Die meeste van ons hou ook van eet, veral brood en vleis. Het Nelson Mandela regtig gedink ek lyk soos jou gemiddelde Afrikaanse plaasmeisie?

Ek is daardie aand huis toe en het trots vir my ouers vertel ek het generaal Viljoen ontmoet. Ek het nog steeds glad nie in politiek belang gestel nie. Al wat ek geweet het, is dat hulle oor doktor Johan Heyns se dood gepraat het. My ouers was dié keer duidelik meer beïndruk deur my aankondiging, aangesien Viljoen gesien is as iemand wat vir konserwatiewe Afrikaners opstaan. ’n Verslag oor die ondersoek na die moord op Heyns het later op my lessenaar beland, maar ek het geen begeerte gehad om dit te lees nie, iets waaroor ek later baie spyt was.

Soos die jaar aangestap het, het ek tuis begin voel in my werksomgewing en met my pligte. Ek het Mary op hoogte van veiligheidsake gehou, die lugmag van die president se bewegings in kennis gestel en met sy personeel in die ANC gewerk. Maandae was die president heeldag by Shell House, die ANC se hoofkwartier in Johannesburg. (Die hoofkwartier het later geskuif na Luthuli-huis, vernoem na Albert Luthuli, voormalige leier van die ANC). Ons is nie toegelaat om die president op Maandae te steur nie, en vyf jaar lank het hy elke Maandag daar deurgebring wanneer ons nie oorsee was nie. Ons het nooit geweet wat hy daar maak en saam met wie nie, en hy het nooit partypolitiek en sy pligte as president gemeng nie. Maar hy was onafskeidbaar van die ANC en sou nooit wegstap van die party wat sy lewe en politieke loopbaan gevorm het nie. As president het hy die ANC se beleid en struktuur nagevolg.

Op ’n dag het Mary my gebel om te sê die president wil hê ek moet na sy huis in Houghton, Johannesburg, toe ry om hom met iets in Afrikaans te help. Hy het probleme met een van sy oë gehad ná ’n operasie en sou ’n paar dae lank by die huis bly tot hy beter voel.

Toe ek by sy huis in Houghton aankom, was daar ’n paar veiligheidsvoertuie buite geparkeer. Die president self het op ’n gemakstoel buite in die tuin onder ’n boom gesit. Hy het ’n sonbril opgehad, met sy voete op ’n voetstoeltjie. Die sonbril was natuurlik om sy oog, wat nog nie gesond was nie, te beskerm. Ons het handgeskud en hy het my vriendelik gegroet. Hy het my gevra om langs hom te kom sit en *Beeld*, die Afrikaanse dagblad in ons gebied,

vir my aangegee en gevra of ek dit vir hom sal lees. Ek was skielik paniekerig. Dit het vir ’n oomblik gevoel asof ek nie meer kan lees nie.

Ek het aangeploeter totdat hy my gestop het. Hy het gesê ek moet ontspan. Daar was ’n lag in sy stem toe hy my vra om van voor af te begin, hierdie keer ’n bietjie stadiger. Dit was makliker. Toe kom ek in die artikel op die van Mamoepa af. Ronnie Mamoepa was toe die ANC se woordvoerder. Ek het die naam presies gelees asof dit ’n Afrikaanse woord was. Die president het my stilgemaak en reggehelp: ’n mens spreek dit Mamo-epa uit. Ek het dankie gesê en aangehou lees. Toe ek weer by die naam uitkom, het ek probeer om dit so vinnig as moontlik verby te kry, maar die president het weer gekeer en my geduldig reggehelp. Toe moes ek dit agter hom aan sê. Teen die derde keer het ek besef ek moet konsentreer en dat hy nie daarvan gaan hou as hy sien ek probeer nie regtig nie. Ek begin toe fokus en met die vierde keer wat ek dit raaklees, het hy my gelukgewens met my goeie uitspaak. Ek het gevoel asof ek ’n goue medalje by die Olimpiese Spele gewen het en was amper verleë oor die ophef wat hy gemaak het. Ek het ’n bietjie ontspan, maar nie heeltemal nie. Ek het ook te vinnig gelees en hy het my ’n paar keer laat weet ek moet stadiger. Dit was net die spanning. Hy het my toe gevra om iets aan hom te verduidelik wat hy nie verstaan nie en ek het die sin weer gelees en die konteks uitgelê. Nadat ek nog ’n paar artikels gelees het, het hy gesê ek kan maar teruggaan Pretoria toe. Ek onthou ek het soos ’n marathonatleet gesweet van die senuwees en ek was bly om terug te wees in Pretoria, waar ek weer eens van ’n ongemaklike samekoms moes herstel.

Daarna was ons terug by ons ou roetine, maar die volgende keer dat ek die president gesien het, was ek meer op my gemak. Ek was nie direk betrokke by sy dagtake nie, maar partykeer het ek hom gesien wanneer hy by my kantoor verbystap, en ander kere het ek hom in die gang teëgekom. Ek het nie meer weggekruip of skaam gevoel nie en besluit as hy van my wou ontslae raak omdat ek ’n Afrikaner is, sou ek dit maar moes aanvaar en ’n ander plan maak. Vir die eerste keer het dit vir my gelyk asof so iets nie sou gebeur nie en al was ek nog ’n bietjie skepties oor sy gevoel teenoor wit mense, het ek troos gevind in die feit dat hy tot in daardie stadium net warmte uitgestraal het.

Ek het probeer om die politieke wêreld om my te verstaan. Dit was nie maklik nie en ek moes letterlik ’n kitskursus in Suid-Afrikaanse

politiek volg. Een van die lyfwagte het aangebied om my en my twee beste vriende, Pieter Moolman en Andries Ellis, op 'n toer deur Soweto te vat. Soweto is 'n township aan die buitewyke van Johannesburg waar swart mense in die apartheidsjare moes bly. Ons was senuweeagtig en bang, maar ons het gegaan omdat ons nuuskierig was om te sien hoe dit lyk.

Die lyfwag het vir ons president Mandela se eerste huis in Vilakazistraat gewys, en toe aartsbiskop Desmond Tutu s'n in dieselfde straat. Ons was ook by die Hector Pieterson-museum, waar hy vir ons van 1976 se skole-opstand vertel het. Hector was 'n dertienjarige kind toe hy saam met duisende ander skoolkinders aan die betoging deelgeneem het om beswaar te maak omdat skole gedwing is om alle klasse vir swart kinders in Afrikaans aan te bied. Die betoging was veronderstel om vreedsaam te wees, maar geweld het uitgebreek toe die polisie opdaag en op kinders begin skiet het om hulle uitmekaar te jaag. Hector is getref, en die bekende foto waarop 'n ander leerling met 'n sterwende Hector in sy arms weghardloop, het die beeld geword wat die wêreld van Suid-Afrika onder apartheid gesien het. Hector was 'n held.

Die polisieman wat ons Soweto toe gevat het, het vir ons wegkruipplekke gewys wat die ANC en sy militêre vleuel gebruik het terwyl die beweging verbied was. Ons was opgewonde omdat ons nuwe dinge kon leer, maar ook senuweeagtig omdat ons in Soweto was. Wit mense het nie in daardie tyd Soweto toe gegaan nie, maar ons begeleier was gewapen en ek het geweet hy sou in die moeilikheid kom as ons iets moes oorkom in sy sorg. Ons het gesien Soweto was nie die sogenaamde plakkerskamp soos ek gedink het dit sou wees nie. Mense was besig om groot huise daar te bou, party van hulle baie luuks, en ek kon niks sien waarvoor ek bang hoef te wees nie. Ek het later gehoor ons gids het bande met die Nasionale Intelligensiediens gehad en soms gedink die toer was net 'n manier om te kyk of ons enige bedreiging vir die president inhou. Dit sou sin maak, aangesien ek so naby die president beweeg het.

Aan die einde van 1994 is die president op vakansie Saoedi-Arabië toe. Ek kon glad nie verstaan hoekom enigiemand daar sou wou vakansie hou nie. Ek het gehoor die president het 'n hospitaal besoek terwyl hy daar was en 'n paar Suid-Afrikaanse verpleegsters ontmoet,

en dat hy ook vriende daar het, maar ’n vakansie in die woestyn was nogtans vir my vreemd.

Op die dag van die president se terugkeer uit Saoedi-Arabië het Mary my gevra om saam te gaan lughawe toe om hom te gaan oplaai. Ek was baie opgewonde en het die kans aangegryp. Teen dié tyd het my houding teenoor hom verander. Sy interaksies met my was altyd aangenaam en hy was vriendelik en warm wanneer hy met my gepraat het. Ek het het dus uitgesien na die geleentheid om hom te sien. Mary het gesê ek moet my foonboekie saambring lughawe toe, aangesien hy oproepe van die lughawe af wou maak, wat toe ook die geval was. Teen daardie tyd het ek my al bewapen met ’n foonboekie met al die belangrike nommers wat Mary of die president nodig kon kry. Dis nie iets wat sy gesê het ek moet doen nie, maar ek het aanvaar ’n mens moet sekere inligting te alle tye by jou hê indien jy doeltreffend wil wees.

Met sy aankoms by die lughawe het die president ons almal gegroet. Dit gelyk asof hy bly was om my te sien en hy het gesê hy het aan my gedink. Ek het weer gedink: Ja, ja. Ek is seker ’n president het belangriker dinge waaroor hy moet nadink as ’n tikster in sy kantoor. Later het ek besef hy het waarskynlik klaar begin werk aan ’n strategie om my te gebruik as ’n perfekte voorbeeld van ’n Afrikaner in sy kantoor en te kyk hoe minderhede hierop reageer. Maar destyds het die gedagte nie by my opgekom nie en hoewel sy woorde vleiend was, het ek hom nie regtig geglo nie.

’n Groot mediakontingent het die aankoms van die president se vlug op die Waterkloof-lugmagbasis ingewag. Pas nadat hy my gegroet het, het iemand ’n foto van hom en Mary geneem waar hulle in die rigting van die BBP-aankomssaal stap. Die foto het in die die *Sunday Times* verskyn, en my pa het die koerant die volgende dag gebel en gevra of hulle vir hom ’n afdruk van die oorspronklike foto kon stuur. Tot my verbasing het hulle ook ’n foto van my geneem waar ek die president groet. Nadat ek die foto ontvang het, het dit my kosbaarste besitting geword en ek het ook trots by my pa begin bespeur, al het hy toe nog nie vir president Mandela ontmoet nie, maar ’n mening gevorm het op grond van stories wat ek vir hom van ons interaksies vertel het. Nelson Mandela was besig om Suid-Afrikaners se menings van hom te verander. My pa s’n ingesluit.

4

Working for a President

We received the strangest calls and requests sometimes in the President's office. On one occasion a gentleman called to say that he had a parrot that could imitate the President and whether he could please bring the parrot to the office for the President to hear it. I was the lucky person to take the call and I obviously said, 'No Sir, I don't think so.' One day I received a call from an Afrikaans gentleman who said, 'Good morning lady, please give me your pints.' I responded by saying, 'Excuse me Sir.' He said again: 'Your pints, I need your pints please.' I said, 'Sir, I think you have the incorrect number as I don't have a clue what you are talking about.' He then explained that he was calling from a dairy farm and dialled the wrong number: he was looking for the pints of milk our dairy produced for the day. I replied, 'Sir, even if I had the pints I wouldn't know how much a pint is.'

A South African serial killer on the run, Colin Chauke, also called our switchboard and wanted to speak to the President, and the President only, to hand himself over to the police. He wanted the President to help him, probably because he was scared that he might be shot when he handed himself over to the police. Olga was on the switchboard that day and acted swiftly to alert the police from another telephone line. The police arrested Chauke a few hours later and he didn't get to speak to the President. We therefore sometimes dealt with serious matters and on other days you had to keep your sanity in check because of the ludicrous things people would suggest or call about.

Things happened at an enormously fast pace. Especially when the President was around. In his presence things were calm but behind the scenes it was running and organizing at speed. There would be very

little time for anything else than work. Somehow Elize based in Cape Town managed much better than us. She had a more balanced life but in Pretoria we raced against time to get through the day. As I have mentioned, Elize had served the former First Lady, Marike de Klerk, and was one of the staff members from the old regime who remained in the dispensation. The rest of us really had no knowledge or skill of having been in a President's office before and a lot was done on trial and error.

The Presidency was focused on implementing the interim constitution and setting up structures to enhance the functioning of the constitution, which was signed into law in 1996. The President himself was very focused on reconciliation and nurturing both black and white people's emotions that were bruised as a result of apartheid.

Apart from typing up the President's schedule and distributing it daily to security, households, airforce and concerned parties, Mary tasked me with a few other mundane things. She would occasionally ask me to bring tea to the President or his guests or even drive her car to be filled with fuel and fetch her dry cleaning. I didn't mind doing anything and whatever was asked. I often dropped off documents at the President's house in Pretoria, received visitors and learned how to deal with any enquiries that came to the President's personal staff. We started operating in a more structured way, where work was divided between the three private secretaries and Alan and I had to deal with most of the administration. Although operating within the larger office as the Department of the Office of the President, the President's personal staff dealt with more of his private matters and day-to-day appointments and movements as well as requests directly related to him or requiring his personal attention, while the Department dealt with policy, cabinet and political issues.

I now knew Professor Jakes Gerwel, the head of the President's office, a little better. Professor Gerwel – or Prof. as we called him – was an academic and anti-apartheid activist since his early life, and was a brown man originating from the Eastern Cape. He was head-hunted from the University of the Western Cape to become the Chief of Staff at the President's office and the Secretary of Cabinet in the first democratically elected government. He was my first introduction to a real intellectual and when I met him for the first time I was a little surprised that a brown man could have so many academic qualifications. Most of his qualifications he obtained cum laude and all of them in literature and language. In my ignorant view only white

people could be that learned. I was told about all his qualifications before I met him. He was a very likeable person who clearly respected people without prejudice – I had expected to be looked down upon by a person with so many qualifications. Even though it didn't sound right, I was told that he was an Afrikaner too. Again my own prejudices made it difficult to believe that anyone who wasn't white could be an Afrikaner. Prof.'s smile and his hair were his trademarks. His hair was very disorderly and in an afro-type style. It reminded me of Albert Einstein's. Whenever the President was in the office, Prof. Gerwel would frequently pass our offices on his way to see him and always stopped to enquire about our well-being. The president relied heavily on Prof. Gerwel for advice on every detail of his presidency. They had a very close relationship and the President had a lot of admiration for Prof.'s calm and calculated approach not only to matters of national importance but even in dealing with issues in his personal environment.

* * *

It was February 1995 and we were all preparing to move to Cape Town for Parliament's first session of the year.

In Cape Town all Parliamentarians lived in a village exclusively built for them called Acasia Park. According to rank and years of service you got allocated either an apartment or a small house, also depending on the size of your family. For us single girls, bachelor apartments with a small kitchen and a bathroom were adequate. I loved the independence and soon made friends with some of my colleagues. Maretha Slabbert was one such person; she worked in the Cabinet Secretariat at the Presidency at the time. Seventeen years later Maretha and I still worked together and she was single-handedly the most important support in my life to date, both professionally and personally.

Come July, Parliament would go into recess and we would all pack up and move back to Pretoria for the rest of the year. It was not something I looked forward to and I was hoping to avoid going back to anything that deprived me of my independence, like living at my parents' home and having to report to anyone. Yet, I looked forward to seeing my friends and sharing my experiences with them, and then of course to certain home comforts such as having your clothes washed and ironed automatically in the course of everyday life and

not having to worry about those things. Often at parties my friends would tease me, telling people that I now worked for the 'enemy'. I took it as a joke but as we grew older and more mature we eventually started debating history and politics more seriously. I felt more informed and at least able to converse in an intelligent manner on something I thought I was gathering knowledge about. These debates often ended in heated argument because my perspective on events in South Africa was slowly changing, due to my interaction with the President and the knowledge I had acquired from some of my colleagues.

Mary also spent more time with me and told me about the President's private life; his failed marriage to Winnie Madikizela and about their daughters, Zindzi and Zenani. Apart from official events where the President needed a companion and he would ask Zindzi or Zenani to join him, I rarely saw them, and judging from his diary one realized that the President didn't have much time for a private life. I was also told that he had two surviving children from his first marriage but we never saw them or had any dealings with them.

I had noticed, now, that whenever the President had Afrikaners visiting him, he would call me to deliver documents or ask me to serve tea in his office. I didn't mind as it posed another opportunity to see him. He was removing my defences day by day, chiselling away my prejudices and the layers of apartheid that had grown on me in the same way he chiselled the limestone while he was imprisoned on Robben Island. He would ask with real interest how I was, about my parents, about my well-being. Every time he saw me he would ask something different. Any person that takes an interest in you automatically becomes likeable, no matter what your preconceived ideas about him or her. And then it was done with sincerity in this case so I enjoyed the attention. I had never imagined that I would be of significance for a President to enquire about my well-being.

On one such occasion a documentary was being filmed around the President's day-to-day life. I was instructed to serve tea in his office that day during a meeting attended by Jay Naidoo, Minister without Portfolio in the Presidency, and the man I would have worked for if fate hadn't brought Mary into my interview. I wasn't prepared and didn't feel properly dressed to serve tea in his office that day. I nevertheless served the tea and the President introduced me to Minister Naidoo in Afrikaans. The Minister smiled unconvincingly. I found it hard to be sure whether all former anti-apartheid activists

had joined Mr Mandela in the decision to forgive.

When the documentary aired, my parents were taken aback by reports that some friends of theirs had decided to cut ties with them because I served tea to a black man. The entire Afrikaans community was not adapting well to the changes in South Africa. Their interaction and relationships with black people remained on the same level as during apartheid – that of master and servant. Life for most whites continued unchanged, in the same bubble of their materialist comfort as before, and not all white people were actually making a concerted effort to change the country into a non-racial society. Sadly many remain in that bubble even today.

My parents found themselves in an awkward situation. They had no reason to suspect that I wasn't happy at work. They could see that I worked hard and I liked what I was doing, yet it was clear that the community wasn't going to support my endeavours. (Years later the same people wanted to talk to me about having books signed by then retired President Mandela and I took pleasure in arranging this. Whether their views had changed only towards the President, I don't know.)

* * *

That autumn I got a call from Rochelle, the President's niece who looked after him at home in Johannesburg, to say that he wanted me to accompany him to a United World Colleges event in the Carlton Hotel that night. After the President left his then wife, Winnie Madikizela Mandela, in 1992, his first permanent residence was in a suburb called Houghton and Rochelle moved in with him to look after him, organizing his house and workers but also providing him with some personal support at home. I was in Pretoria at the time of the call and panic struck. I asked my mother what to wear and we selected a simple black skirt and jacket. I was expected to be at the President's house at a certain time and Rochelle said that he wanted me to drive with him. That made me even more nervous. What was I supposed to say or do in the car sitting next to a President? No one prepares you for these things.

I arrived at his house and asked Rochelle what was expected of me. She said I should just go along and when he is supposed to speak I should put the speech where he is supposed to speak from, as well as his reading glasses, make sure he had water to drink, and security

would take care of the rest. I was anxious to hear from Rochelle that the President called Mary to inform her that he wanted me to go with him. It made me somewhat uncomfortable that she was not the one instructing me to go with him. That was the totality of Rochelle's briefing.

The President came downstairs and he greeted friendly and invited me to get into the car. The security opened the heavily armoured door and I could barely move it. I didn't want to intrude in the President's space so kept to my corner of the car and sat as close to the door as possible. Tense. On our way to the Carlton Hotel in mid-Johannesburg the President said that I would now meet Queen Noor, the wife of the King of Jordan. I asked him how I was supposed to address her and he smilingly explained, 'No, you see, you call her Your Majesty' because she was a Queen. The President always started his sentences with a 'No' whether the answer was yes or no, and it usually was followed with 'you see'. I paid so much attention to his every word that I couldn't help but notice it. He had a way of addressing people with the utmost respect, no matter who you were, and even his choice of words conveyed that respect. Starting every sentence with 'No' didn't have any negative connotation. It was just habit and a gentler way of starting off with any sentence.

Arriving at the event people quickly started crowding around the President and the security found it difficult to keep people away from him while at the same time trying to allow him to walk towards the door of the event. At the door he was met by Her Majesty. The President introduced me by saying, 'Your Majesty, this is my secretary Zelda la Grange': a) I wasn't his secretary, and b) I really didn't think she cared. But to my surprise she took interest in me and asked how long I had been working for the President. My answer: almost a year. The fact that I didn't have a long history with him clearly didn't discourage her to show interest in me. She was one of the most beautiful ladies I've ever met and she had the stature of a Queen. She moved with grace and I had to pinch myself not to stare. I had met a Queen!

Little did I know that a greater surprise awaited me inside. The security led us to the main table. I had never experienced such chaos in a crowd before and was trying my best to stay as close as possible to the President. I felt bewildered as people pushed against us, preventing us from moving freely, in addition to the security forming a tight circle around us. Everyone wanted to touch the President or

see him close to. As soon as he and the Queen stood behind their chairs in the hall people quietened down and got ready to take their seats. I turned around and asked the security: ‘Where am I supposed to go?’ I was relying on them to guide me and teach me what to do. They showed me my seat, right next to the Queen. I blushed and felt blood and my heart pumping in every muscle of my body. There was no way, none, zero, absolutely no chance that I had to sit next to a Queen. What would I say? What do I do? I couldn’t even remember from my crash course on etiquette what cutlery to use first. Somewhere in the back of my mind I remember overhearing my mom saying ‘start from the outside’. OK, that deals with that then. But still this cannot be happening. I told the security that it was a mistake. In the meantime the President and Queen took their seats and I was confused, nervously trying to get away, at this point being the only one in the room still standing around.

The President looked at me in a way that exclaimed ‘Zelda, take your seat.’ I looked into his eyes, mine filled with panic as if to say, ‘Rescue me; tell me to go away.’ But he nodded his head instead to signal sit down. So I sat. The Queen and the President exchanged pleasantries and I had no idea who sat to my other side. The person could have been naked or dead. I wouldn’t have noticed. I followed the pattern on the table cloth with my eyes and later put my hand on the table to draw the lines of the pattern with my finger. I was hoping to appear to be relaxed but I was dying inside of tension and nervousness. I knew I was supposed to keep my elbows off the table but I could no longer disguise my ineptness and I thought placing my elbow on the table would ground me a little more. Surely seating me next to a Queen was completely against protocol. Even I knew that.

The Queen turned to me and started talking to me. I smiled and looked past her to the President again with a look in my eyes that said: ‘OK Sir, you are supposed to help me here.’ I was a bit upset with him as he didn’t come to my rescue but only smiled, clearly not noticing my anxiety. The Queen started asking me about the political situation in the country, where I grew up, etc. I cannot remember what I responded but I knew I had to sound like the eternal optimist because I assumed if I was with the President it was expected of one to be positive about the future of South Africa. I didn’t really know what I was talking about and I wasn’t sure what to think yet: whether I really saw a future for South Africa and where we were heading. My opinion of the new South Africa had not really evolved beyond the

fact that I now kind of liked the President.

And then, I was saved by the bell. Proceedings started and after the Queen's speech the President was asked to speak. He was speaking from his seat and a microphone was handed to him. I handed him his speech and glasses and he put his glasses back on the table and started reading his speech. I thought: Why would he need his glasses if he doesn't use them? After completing his speech he handed it back to me and said out loud: 'Thank you darling.' His words were filled with consideration and gratefulness. I wasn't used to anyone calling me 'darling'. Later I realized that it was just an affectionate term he used for many women from time to time. If a woman or a stranger calls me 'darling' I have always felt that there is a derogatory connotation to it. But surely you don't mind Nelson Mandela calling you 'darling'? Blood rushed to my head and I was shy with shock – almost the same feeling as when your mother used to kiss you in public as teenager, somewhat shy over the association and affection. I thought I had done my duty however, and was ready to relax and start eating.

We sat waiting for food for about five minutes and then the President said, 'Zelda, I think it is time for us to leave.' The master of ceremonies announced his departure and off we went. As years passed I also realized that he wasn't fond of eating anywhere. He simply adored his home-cooked food prepared by one of his long-serving Xhosa chefs, Xoliswa or Gloria, and therefore he hardly ever ate at public events.

On the way to the car someone approached with a copy of the President's autobiography, Long Walk to Freedom. Security turned him away but the man insisted, reaching the President himself, who couldn't really say no. After he signed the book, he handed it to a security officer and moved to the car. When I looked round the security man had ripped the page with the President's signature out of the book, telling the man that he should not have disobeyed instructions. I went into complete shock. Little did I know that I would become one of the people who had to try and maintain order no matter what it took, although I luckily stopped short of tearing pages out of books.

On the way home, I told the President that I thought it was inappropriate that I sat next to the Queen. He smiled and said, 'Don't worry, it was OK.' That made me even more nervous. The President wasn't fazed by it at all. At home he invited me in for coffee but I was eager to head back to Pretoria. This was too much to handle. He

insisted that security drive with me 'to my house' he said, but outside I convinced them that it wasn't necessary. They were tired and I was definitely not going to have anyone follow me home. When I later accompanied him more regularly he would insist on the security driving with me and we learned to agree only to break our agreement as soon as we left the door.

* * *

In the winter of 1995 the President was invited to a town in the Western Cape, Swellendam, a small village-like Afrikaans town along the Garden Route in South Africa, to receive the Freedom of the Town. It was an act of unity for a town that was dominated still by white Afrikaners to offer the President such an honour, and he agreed to accept it. Again, a few days prior to the event, he announced that he wanted me to go with him. He called me to Genadendal the day before, his official residence in Cape Town, and upon arrival asked me to sit down. Genadendal is the name of a small brown Afrikaans community in the rural Western Cape. He adopted the name for his official residence in Cape Town to pay homage to the community of Genadendal, which means something like 'valley of gratitude' when translated directly.

He announced that he wanted to practise his Afrikaans and I had to help him with pronunciation as his entire speech was in Afrikaans. He fired away and unceremoniously started reading. At first I didn't have the heart to correct him but then he would look up every now and again to seek approval. I nodded like a real teacher and hated myself for appearing to be such a supremacist. Although I had been asked to help him, the situation presented was so typical of the apartheid era of a white overseeing what the black man was doing and the black man seeking approval from the white. I also couldn't really understand what he was reading and I had to adjust my concentration level. Then he wanted to re-read the speech for a second time. So I agreed – who wouldn't? – but this time I gathered some courage to add a few corrections. He was becoming more nervous to read and would peek at me over his reading glasses, this time seeking less approval but more affirmation. I nevertheless nodded.

It was my first helicopter ride ever. I was nervous but I watched the President's face and saw that he was at ease in the big military

Oryx helicopter. I relaxed. It was being flown by white military pilots and I wondered whether he trusted them. By 1995 very few black pilots had been trained and qualified to be absorbed into the transformed military forces. On our way I thought about his speech and wondered whether he was going to remember the words we'd practised the previous day. I was nervous for him while he appeared relaxed, as if he was on his way to a social gathering of some sort.

Arriving in Swellendam he was received with open arms and insisted on first walking among the ordinary people, and when a little girl came to greet him on stage his face and body language opened up completely. He spoke to her in Afrikaans too and she responded although she was shy. He enjoyed that interaction and I could see that he had a special connection to the child. He delivered his speech and remembered the words I had helped him with. It was perfect. By delivering his entire speech in Afrikaans he reached out to the community's heart and people adored him for that.

Back in the office in Pretoria it was on one of the occasions that I served tea in his office, although he was by himself this time, that he requested me to take a seat at the other side of his desk. I nervously did, not knowing what to expect. The President didn't easily tell you to sit down at his desk. I thought I was in some kind of trouble and tried to remember what stories I told to whom in the last couple of weeks, trying to assess why I was in trouble. He then said, 'No . . . you see, I want you to come to Japan with me.' My first thoughts were: Would that not be considered inappropriate to travel abroad together? and then I thought: Oh no, I'm convinced this is similar to my experience of my first encounter with him; I simply don't understand what he is saying. I think I replied with 'Excuse me Sir?' and he repeated the question while I needed time to process what he was saying. 'I want you to come to Japan with me,' he repeated. And all I could think of to say was, 'Thank you very much Mr President but I don't have money to go to Japan right now.' He burst out laughing, probably not knowing how to respond to such stupidity.

He saw the surprise on my face to his laughter and he quickly composed himself to repeat the question, this time with a bit of essential detail: 'I want you to travel to Japan as part of my delegation on our state visit.' I had a vague idea that this was work but he continued to say that I should go to the Director General, the Chief of Staff of the Presidency, Prof. Gerwel, who would explain everything to me. I thanked him and left his office. I didn't say a word to Mary and I

cannot recall if she was in her office as I passed through to my own office. I returned to my desk to digest what had just happened. I didn't know what to do with the information in my head and who to contact next. The President made it sound so easy to speak to Prof. Gerwel but he was, after all, the head of our office and it was not as simple as walking through his door and demanding answers. So I decided to leave it there and not speak to anyone about this again and forget that it had ever happened. I was convinced it was just a mistake.

A few days later Prof. Gerwel passed our office on his way to the President and greeted us as usual. He approached me at my desk and told me that he had spoken to the President and that he had mentioned to him that I should be included in the delegation. I was nervous. He pointed me to the Department of Foreign Affairs to have a passport issued and told me who to speak to, to make arrangements. He also told me that we would be joined by another young lady from the Western Cape. Her name was Melissa Brink. The President encountered a debate with her in the Western Cape at a public meeting with the brown community, during which he was impressed by her inquisitiveness and the way she challenged the ANC to provide her with the education that her parents believed would be provided if they voted the ANC into power. In her view, progress was too slow and she had the courage to challenge the President when she had the opportunity. He liked the fact that such a youngster was so serious about her education to have the guts to question the President over it.

I had no idea why I was invited to go on this trip and no one else knew either. What I really thought was a bonus was that I wasn't expected to pay for anything but rather received an extra allowance for travelling abroad. When I heard the amount I would be paid I was alarmed as it sounded like a danger pay of some sort. I think I drove the officials at Foreign Affairs crazy with all my questions – clearly a sign of my inexperience. I also had a sense of guilt towards Mary. I didn't know whose duty it was to inform her that I would be accompanying the delegation on this trip or what my role would be and I felt uncomfortable being in a space where she was uncertain about my role too; after all, I was working more for her than for the President.

The day arrived for me to depart with the advance team for Japan. I don't think I've ever been so excited in my entire life. Armed with my diplomatic passport, newly sewn clothes and manners recited from my mother, I departed on my first ever trip abroad. Before that day, I

had never left the borders of South Africa and my first trip overseas being to Japan was almost like a fantasy.

Upon arrival in Tokyo we were met by officials from the Embassy and driven to the Osaka Palace Hotel. I could sense that all the officials were as puzzled with my presence as I was. Mary arrived a day later and things were tense between us. People were careful not to offend me because they knew my presence was the result of a direct instruction from the President. I was trying to figure out who did what on a state visit but it was not easy. We were surrounded by security and protocol officials and I soon took a liking to a gentleman by the name of Johan Nieman from Foreign Affairs. Johan guided me and explained things in great detail. He was also the first person to say: 'So how did you get to be put on the trip and what is your role?' I explained that I was merely the typist and I had no idea what my role was, but he comforted me with the fact that the President personally invited Melissa and I and therefore we should not be intimidated by anything or anyone. That made me feel a little better.

In my conversations with colleagues on the trip I got a sense of why we were there: for the South African government to strengthen its economic ties with Japan. We were accompanied by a few ministers and it became apparent what is expected of such office bearers during state visits. I was slowly developing a sense of politics.

President Mandela was to meet the Japanese Emperor. Upon arrival at the Emperor's palace we were told to stand in a receiving line. The most senior officials, the ministers, closest to the President and then in order of seniority down the line to the most junior. Of course Melissa and I were right at the end.

It was the first time it dawned on me why Melissa and I indeed accompanied the delegation on the trip. Melissa was introduced as a coloured, mixed-race young lady and I was introduced as an Afrikaner. I looked at my colleagues and realized that our delegation was completely 'representative', and I was happy to be part of that. The President wanted all the races represented in his team. He was determined to show the world that just as he preached reconciliation to the South African public, it was something he felt so strongly about that he wanted to apply that methodological thinking also in his own office, and commit to bringing about unity in South Africa even in his closest environment.

When the President got to me he introduced me to the Emperor by saying, 'This is Zelda la Grange, she is my secretary and a real

Afrikaner boere-meisie.' I wasn't sure the Emperor knew what an 'Afrikaner boere-meisie' was and he appeared puzzled, but courteously smiled while he shook my hand.

I also soon discovered that I could speak to the President in Afrikaans whenever I didn't know what to do and that he would calmly direct me on the right protocol. He was being briefed by protocol officials and whenever he saw me hesitating, he would speak to me in Afrikaans and direct me. When the President had rest periods we didn't move from the guest house. Other delegates went out shopping and sightseeing but I was too scared to move. What if the President called me and I wasn't there? It was inconceivable. At the state banquet I sat at a good distance from the President but I could see and watch his every move.

* * *

Life for ordinary South Africans still hadn't changed much since President Mandela's inauguration in 1994, although there was a sense of optimism. What one saw of the President on TV was that he always greeted people respectfully and without prejudice. The public liked that. Our economy stabilized and investors started having confidence in the new South Africa. However, a watershed moment in President Mandela's Presidency approached in 1995 and an opportunity to show the world that South Africa would survive; that we were healthy and well.

The Rugby World Cup was being played in South Africa. Rugby was still very much considered a white man's sport in South Africa, even though I later discovered that black people, especially in the Eastern Cape, had played rugby for decades, but because of apartheid they were never allowed to participate in the sport publicly, or to be active spectators. Rugby is something most white Afrikaner people religiously follow and support, but the teams and attendance of public matches during apartheid were restricted for whites only. Prior to the World Cup the selectors included a brown Afrikaans-speaking young man in the national team (the Springboks) by name of Chester Williams.

The President met the Springboks before the start of the tournament at their training camp in the Western Cape, and on the day of the opening match in Newlands he was there to cheer them. When Chester (or Chessie as I later fondly addressed him) entered the

field the crowd went crazy cheering him along. Chester was scoring points during matches and for that, white people started supporting his selection.

I never knew that the President even knew the rules of rugby but apparently he did – probably understanding more about the game than I did. He sat next to the Managing Director of SA Rugby, Dr Louis Luyt, as well as the Prime Minister of Australia, as the Springboks were playing the Australian team, the Wallabys, in this opening match. The President was in good spirits and took a bet with the Prime Minister that whoever won that day would win the tournament, and the loser would send the other a case of wine as both countries had reputable industries. South Africa won the match and we went right through to the historic day of the final in Johannesburg. (After our victory, the wine arrived from Australia and it was donated to a charity for fundraising purposes.)

I heard Mary calling around a few days before the final asking for a Springbok jersey, but didn't know why or for who. Then the day before the match, when we said our goodbyes at the office, she told me that the President would enter the field on the day of the final wearing a Springbok jersey. I thought that was quite original but didn't make more of it.

Mary gave me two tickets to the final match and I invited my dad to accompany me. We were well on time at the stadium and the crowd was excited and the vibe explosive. Shortly before kick-off the announcement came: 'Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome the President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Nelson Mandela' and he entered surrounded by bodyguards and rugby officials. The crowd cheered but when they caught sight of him in his green and gold jersey people started chiming 'Nelson Nelson Nelson'. At first I thought it was disrespectful to call him by first name but then when I looked around me people didn't seem to think about that but like one man they stood up and started screaming, whistling and shouting with excitement to see the black President in a Springbok jersey and cap. People felt a sense of pride irrespective of their political convictions. He greeted both teams and the National Anthems were sung.

It was a tense match and my dad and I jumped up and down with excitement like old buddies. Then in the extra time Joel Stransky kicked a drop goal which led South Africa to victory. The crowd exploded. People were hugging and kissing strangers, some even crying with joy. For a few hours our past didn't matter; we went

colour blind and people embraced the opportunity to celebrate as South Africans. South Africa was excluded from the first two Rugby World Cups in 1987 and 1991 because of apartheid and was only allowed to participate in the international sporting arena after our first democratic elections. It was our first participation and we won the tournament.

It remains one of the best strategic moves of Nelson Mandela's Presidency in uniting the country to wear that jersey that day. The world saw South Africa as a united nation. He embraced what was considered the 'white man's sport' and by taking that leap into their most emotional territory he reached way beyond the borders of race and touched the people's hearts. He was proud of the Springboks but he was also proud of every citizen in the country, for them and with them. He would often refer to that day when saying that sport had the ability to unite people way beyond borders of division, and in a humble way I think he underplayed his own genius on that day.

The President soon invited the Springbok team for lunch after their victory and from there his close association with rugby started. He was fond of Francois Pienaar who captained the Springboks, but as proud of all the other players that led us to be not only a victorious team but a victorious nation. For years to follow the President would be very supportive of rugby until he got criticized for supporting it too much and not paying enough attention to other sports. There was always a juggling act to maintain. As much as he had to nurture the rugby players in the beginning he then had to learn to create a healthy distance.

Later, in 1998, the former President of the South African Rugby Union, Dr Louis Luyt, took President Mandela to court to contest a Commission of Inquiry that the President had established into the affairs of South African rugby. Luyt contested the President's constitutional right to appoint such a body to investigate rugby for alleged racism and nepotism, the SA Rugby Union being an independent private body. Luyt was described in the Sunday Times of 16 August 1998 as 'the nearest thing to a rugby war lord and the man fans loved to hate'. The now late Steve Tshwete was the Minister of Sport and Recreation at the time and he was concerned about the President's insistence to defend himself in court. The President's lawyers and advisors offered to represent him but he refused.

Judge William de Villiers was presiding over the case and on 19 March 1998, when the President walked into court, he walked to the

prosecuting lawyers first and shook hands with each and every one of them, including Dr Luyt. He then greeted his own team and took his seat. I was angry on the first day at him and thought that if these people had the audacity to question the President, why should he give them any attention or even be friendly with them? When I raised the incident with the President during tea time he taught me a lesson I would never forget: 'Remember, the way you approach a person will determine how that person reacts to you.' If you start off by disarming your enemy the battle is halfway won. The prosecutors were indeed caught off guard by this gesture but they quickly recovered when they launched their attack. The other thing he said was never to allow your enemy to determine the grounds for battle. If they wanted the courtroom to be the battlefield, we had to neutralize them by showing them that it was not a personal matter, but by being friendly we have moved the battle to a psychological advantage. I heard and believed what he had said but to me it was very personal and ugly.

They eventually called him to the stand and he insisted on standing while being questioned, regardless of the Judge inviting him to sit down. The prosecutor would ask him questions in different ways and then the President would answer by saying, 'My Lord, I believe Mr Maritz has already asked that question and I responded.' The Judge would ask the prosecutor to continue and again the President would respond by saying he had already answered the question and that he felt his intelligence was being undermined if the prosecutor put the same question three times in a row in a different manner. It was tense in the courtroom as the President was getting angry. The trained lawyer within the President bloomed. He was shining in court even though I felt they were being unreasonable.

During lunch we would let his food be brought from Mahlamba Ndlopfu and he would sit quietly in a chamber eating. He was thinking and reflecting and strategizing for the next session. In the afternoon he was back on the stand. I had to pinch myself several times to keep quiet as I was disgusted by the prosecuting team. On more than one occasion I wanted to offer my remarks too. I gasped a few times at the way they tried to ridicule the President. How times had changed! Dr Luyt was a pure Afrikaner. Now I was siding with the President. Not because I worked for him but because I believed in what he stood for and his right as President to ask for this inquiry to be established. After proceedings had closed I made no secret of my feelings and told the President. He was calm and collected as ever,

tired but not emotionally affected by proceedings like I was.

The government and therefore President Mandela lost the case but then appealed. The outcome was overturned much later by the Appeals Court but by that time the Commission of Inquiry had lost its relevance and never resumed its work.

While still recovering from the bruises of our defeat in court, we were preparing for the state visit of President Jacques Chirac of France to South Africa. A massive state banquet was being planned in Johannesburg. The President called me and told me to ensure through our Protocol department that Dr Luyt as well as his legal team be invited to the banquet. I agreed but when I put down the phone I thought: Over my dead body. I will deliberately just forget about it. Why would we invite people who belittled the President the way they did? He had not an ounce of bitterness in him towards white people despite apartheid, yet they wanted to so badly prove him wrong, not in private but in public. How could I be party to inviting them to enjoy a banquet which clearly every person in South Africa wanted to attend? So I neglected my task and I didn’t tell the Protocol section about the President’s request. The next day he specifically called me to ask: ‘Did you invite Dr Luyt and his legal team?’ And I said, ‘No Khulu, not yet.’ I also didn’t reveal my plan to conveniently, deliberately forget about it. But the next day and the day after he reminded me again. And I realized he was not going to forget and that if he looked for them at the dinner, which he then did, I was going to be in an enormous amount of trouble if we hadn’t invited them. He wanted to greet them and I was shocked. Despite all that had happened, he was his charming self and greeted them like old friends. My ego’s most expensive lesson: that is how you deal with the enemy.

4

Ek werk vir ’n president

Ons het soms die vreemdste oproepe en versoeke in die president se kantoor ontvang. Een keer het ’n man gebel en gesê hy het ’n papegaai

wat die president kon naboots en hy wou weet of hy hom na die kantoor toe kon bring sodat die president dit kon hoor. Ek was die gelukkige persoon wat die oproep ontvang het en ek het natuurlik gesê: 'Nee, meneer, ek dink nie so nie.'

'n Ander keer het 'n Afrikaanse man gebel en gesê: 'Goeiemôre, dame, ek wil asseblief julle pinte hê.'

Ek het geantwoord: 'Verskoon my, meneer?'

Hy het herhaal: 'Julle pinte, asseblief. Ek het julle pinte nodig.'

Ek het gesê: 'Meneer, ek dink u het die verkeerde nommer, want ek het geen benul waarvan u praat nie.'

Hy het toe verduidelik hy is van 'n melkplaas en hy het wel die verkeerde nommer geskakel. Hy was op soek na die pinte melk wat ons melkery daardie dag verwerk het.

Ek het geantwoord: 'Meneer, selfs al het ek die pinte gehad, sou ek nie weet hoeveel melk is daar in 'n pint nie.'

'n Voortvlugtige reeksmoordenaar, Collen Chauke, het ook na ons skakelbord gebel en wou met die president praat, en met niemand anders nie, sodat hy hom aan die polisie kon oorgee. Hy wou gehad het die president moet hom help, waarskynlik omdat hy gevrees het die polisie sou hom doodskiet wanneer hy hom oorgee. Olga was daardie dag op die skakelbord en het die polisie in 'n japtrap van 'n ander lyn af laat weet. Die polisie het Chauke 'n paar ure later in hegtenis geneem en hy het nie met die president gepraat nie. Ons het dus soms belangrike sake hanteer en ander dae moes 'n mens jou varkies op hok hou as gevolg van die lawwe goed wat mense voorstel of waarmee hulle inbel.

Dinge het teen 'n geweldige pas gebeur, veral wanneer die president in die omtrek was. Waar hy by was, was dit kalm, maar agter die skerms het alles teen 'n dolle vaart gebeur. Daar was min tyd vir enigiets anders as werk. In die Kaap het Elize beter gevaar. Sy het 'n meer gebalanseerde lewe as ons gehad, maar in Pretoria was elke dag 'n wedloop teen tyd om alles betyds klaar te kry. Elize se ondervinding in die ou regering het haar goed te staan gekom. Die res van ons het geen ervaring of kennis van werk in 'n presidentskantoor gehad nie en ons moes maar uit ons foute leer.

Die presidensie moes fokus op die instelling van die tussentydse Grondwet. Ons moes strukture opstel om te verseker die Grondwet,

wat in 1996 amptelik onderteken is, sou behoorlik toegepas word. Die president het meestal op versoening gefokus. Hy moes omsien na die emosies van swart en wit mense wat deur apartheid gekneus is.

Ek moes die president se program tik en aan veiligheidsmense, huishoudings, die lugmag en ander betrokke partye uitdeel. Dan moes ek ook allerhande klein dingetjies doen soos Mary my versoek het. Sy wou partykeer hê ek moes tee aan die president en sy besoekers bedien. Soms moes ek haar motor neem om brandstof in te gooi of klere by die droogskoonmakers op- of aflaai. Ek was bereid om enigiets te doen wat ek gevra is. Ek het gereeld dokumente by die president se huis in Pretoria gaan aflaai, besoekers ontvang en geleer om navrae aan die president se persoonlike personeel te behartig. Ons het volgens 'n beter struktuur begin werk. Die werk is tussen die drie private sekretaresses verdeel en ek en Alan Pillay moes die meeste van die administratiewe take behartig. Hoewel ons deel was van die departement van die presidentskantoor, was die president se persoonlike personeel meer gemoeid met sy private sake, sy daaglikse afsprake, sy bewegings en versoeke wat spesifiek vir hom bedoel was. Die departement se fokus was op beleid, die kabinet en politieke sake.

Ek het professor Jakes Gerwel, die hoof van die presidentskantoor, 'n bietjie beter leer ken. Gerwel – of Prof, soos ons hom genoem het – was 'n akademikus en anti-apartheidsaktivis van sy jong dae af. Hy was 'n bruin man uit die Oos-Kaap. Hy is by die Universiteit van die Wes-Kaap gewerf om die hoof van personeel in die presidentskantoor en die sekretaris van die kabinet te wees in die eerste demokraties verkose regering. Hy was die eerste ware intellektueel met wie ek in my lewe te doen gekry het. En die eerste keer toe ek hom ontmoet het, was ek verbaas dat 'n bruin mens soveel kwalifikasies kon hê. Die meeste hiervan het hy *cum laude* verwerf, almal in taal- en letterkunde. In my oningeligte wêreldjie kon net wit mense so geleerd wees. Ek is van al sy kwalifikasies vertel voordat ek hom ontmoet het. Dit was maklik om van hom te hou en hy het mense sonder voorbehoud gerespekteer. Ek het verwag dat iemand met soveel kwalifikasies op my sou neersien. Al het dit vir my verkeerd geklink, het ek gehoor hy is ook 'n Afrikaner. Dit was weer my vooroordeel wat gemaak het dat ek gedink het net wit mense kan Afrikaners wees. Wat 'n mens eerste van Prof raakgesien het, was sy glimlag en sy hare.

Sy hare was baie deurmekaar, in ’n Afro-tipe styl. Dit het my aan Albert Einstein s’n laat dink. Wanneer die president op kantoor was, het professor Gerwel gereeld verby ons kantoor gestap op pad na die president en hy het altyd ’n oomblik afgestaan om te vra hoe dit met ons gaan. Die president het swaar op professor Gerwel gesteun vir advies oor elke aangeleentheid rakende die presidensie. Hulle was baie na aan mekaar en die president het Prof se kalm en berekende benadering tot sake van nasionale belang bewonder, en ook die manier waarop hy persoonlike sake hanteer het.

Dit was Februarie 1995 en ons almal was besig om reg te maak vir die skuif Kaapstad toe vir die jaar se eerste parlementsitting.

In Kaapstad het al die parlementslede in Akasiapark gebly, ’n buurt wat spesifiek vir hulle aangelê is. ’n Woonstel of ’n klein huisie is aan jou toegesê op grond van jou rang en ervaring. Die grootte van jou gesin is ook in ag geneem. Eenvertrekwoonstelle was voldoende vir ons enkellopende meisies. Daar was ’n klein kombuisie en badkamer. Ek het baie van my onafhanklikheid gehou en gou vriende gemaak met ’n paar van my kollegas. Maretha Slabbert was een van hierdie mense. Sy het vir die kabinet-sekretariaat by die presidensie gewerk. Sewentien jaar later het ek en Maretha nog steeds saam gewerk en sy is die grootste steunpilaar wat ek in my hele lewe gehad het, by die werk en in my persoonlike lewe.

In Junie sou die parlementêre reses begin en ons sou almal oppak en terugskuif Pretoria toe vir die res van die jaar. Dis nie iets waarna ek uitgesien het nie en ek het gewens ek kon eerder in Kaapstad aanbly. Ek wou nie my onafhanklikheid prysgee of in my ouerhuis woon of aan enigiemand verslag doen nie. Ek het wel daarna uitgesien om met my vriende te gesels en hulle van my ervarings te vertel. En dit sou ook darem lekker wees om geriewe te hê soos klere wat vir my gewas en gestryk sou word. Iemand sou na die klein dingetjies in my lewe omsien. By partytjies het my vriende my gereeld geterg en gesê ek werk vir die vyand. Ek het dit altyd as ’n grappie aanvaar en soos ons ouer geword het, het ons op ’n ernstiger vlak oor die geskiedenis en politiek begin praat. Ek was beter ingelig en ek kon ten minste ’n intelligente gesprek voer oor iets waarvan ek by die dag meer geleer het. Hierdie debatte het soms in ’n vurige stryery ontaard omdat my uitkyk op gebeure in Suid-Afrika stadig besig was om te verander as

gevolg van my interaksie met die president en die dinge wat ek by my kollegas gehoor het.

Mary het ook meer tyd saam met my deurgebring en my van die president se persoonlike lewe vertel, soos sy huwelik met Winnie Madikizela wat op die rotse geloop het en van sy dogters, Zindzi en Zenani. Ek het sy dogters baie selde gesien, gewoonlik op amptelike geleenthede waar die president hulle saamgebring het wanneer hy ’n metgesel moes hê. As ek na sy dagboek moes kyk, was daar nie veel sprake van ’n huislike lewe vir hom nie. Ek het ook gehoor van sy twee oorlewende kinders uit sy eerste huwelik, en dat hy hulle nooit gesien het nie of skaars kontak met hulle gehad het.

Ek het ook begin agterkom die president het my meer gereeld gevra om dokumente af te lewer of tee in sy kantoor te bedien wanneer Afrikaners hom besoek. Ek het nie omgegee nie, omdat dit my nog ’n geleentheid gegee het om hom te sien. Hy het elke dag die mure om my afgebreek; hy het my vooroordeel laat wegsmelt en die lae van apartheid wat op my gegroei het, weggekap soos hy destyds op Robbeneiland die kalksteen weggekap het. Hy sou met opregte belangstelling vra hoe dit met my en my ouers gaan. Elke keer as hy my sien, sou hy my oor iets anders uitvra. ’n Mens hou amper outomaties van iemand wat in jou belangstel. Dit maak nie saak wat jy voor die tyd van hulle gedink het nie. In hierdie geval was dit eg en ek het van die aandag gehou. Ek het nooit gedink dat ek dit eendag waardig sou wees dat ’n president my oor my welstand sou uitvra nie.

By een so ’n geleentheid was ’n filmspan besig om ’n dokumentêre program oor die president se daaglikse roetine te skiet. Ek is aangesê om tee in sy kantoor te bedien by ’n vergadering wat Jay Naidoo sou bywoon. Hy was die minister sonder portefeulje in die presidensie en die man vir wie ek sou gewerk het as die noodlot nie bepaal het dat Mary tydens my onderhoud by die deur ingestorm het nie. Ek het onvoorbereid gevoel en nie gedink ek is reg aangetrek om tee in sy kantoor te bedien nie. Ek het nietemin die tee ingedra en die president het my in Afrikaans aan minister Naidoo voorgestel. Die minister het onoortuigend geglimlag. Dit was vir my moeilik om seker te wees dat al die vorige anti-apartheidsaktiviste ingeval het by meneer Mandela se besluit om te vergewe.

Nadat die dokumentêre program uitgesaai is, was my ouers verstom

om te hoor dat van hul vriende hulle afgeskryf het omdat ek tee aan ’n swart man bedien het. Nie almal in die Afrikaanse samelewing het by die veranderings aangepas nie. Hul interaksie en verhouding met swart mense was nog steeds op dieselfde vlak as tydens apartheid; dié van meester en kneg. Die lewe het vir die meeste wit mense onveranderd voortgegaan. Hulle was steeds knus in dieselfde kokon van materialistiese gemak. Min wit mense het regtig ’n poging aangewend om die land in ’n nie-rassige gemeenskap te help verander. Ongelukkig is baie van hulle vandag nog in dieselfde kokon vasgevang.

My ouers was in ’n moeilike situasie. Hulle kon sien ek werk hard en dat ek geniet wat ek doen, en tog was dit duidelik dat die gemeenskap my nie daarin sou ondersteun nie. (Jare later sou van dieselfde mense my vra dat die president, wat toe al afgetree was, hul eksemplare van sy boek moes teken en dit was vir my ’n groot plesier om dit te reël. Of hul siening uitsluitlik teenoor die president verander het, kan ek nie sê nie.)

In die herfs van daardie jaar het ek ’n oproep ontvang van Rochelle, die president se kleinniggie, wat by sy huis in Johannesburg na hom omgesien het. Sy het gesê hy wou hê ek moet daardie aand ’n geleentheid van United World Colleges by die Carlton-hotel saam met hom bywoon. Nadat die president en Winnie Madikizela-Mandela in 1992 uiteen is, was sy eerste permanente blyplek in die woonbuurt Houghton, en Rochelle het saam met hom ingetrek om na hom om te sien, om die huis en die personeel te bestuur, maar ook persoonlike steun aan hom te bied. Ek was in Pretoria toe die oproep kom en ek was dadelik paniekerig. Ek het my ma gevra wat ek moes aantrek en sy het ’n eenvoudige swart romp en baadjie voorgestel. Rochelle het gesê ek moes teen ’n sekere tyd by die president se huis wees en dat hy versoek het dat ek saam met hom moes ry. Dit het my nog meer senuweeagtig gemaak. Wat was ek veronderstel om te sê of te doen in die motor langs ’n president? Niemand berei ’n mens op hierdie dinge voor nie.

Ek het by sy huis aangekom en vir Rochelle gevra wat van my verwag word. Sy het gesê ek moet net saamgaan en wanneer dit tyd is vir hom om te praat, moet ek die toespraak op ’n gepaste plek vir hom neersit. Ek moes ook seker maak hy het sy leesbril en water.

Veiligheidspersoneel sou na die ander sake omsien. Ek was angstig toe Rochelle vir my sê die president het Mary gebel om vir haar te sê hy wil hê ek moet hom vergesel. Dit het my effens ongemaklik laat voel dat dit nie Mary was wat die opdrag vir my gegee het nie. Dit was Rochelle se enigste instruksies aan my.

Die president het by die trappe afgekom en my vriendelik gegroet en gevra om in die motor te klim. Sy veiligheidsmense het die swaargepantserde deur, wat ek feitlik nie kon beweeg nie, oopgemaak. Ek wou nie die president se ruimte betree nie en het in ’n hoek van die motor bly sit, so naby aan die deur as moontlik. Gespanne. Op pad na die Carlton-hotel in die middestad het hy gesê ek sou koningin Noor van Jordanië ontmoet. Ek het gevra wat ek haar moet noem en hy het met ’n glimlag verduidelik: ‘Nee, jy sien, jy noem haar U Majesteit omdat sy ’n koningin is.’ Die president het altyd sy sinne met ‘nee’ begin, of die antwoord ja of nee was, en dit opgevolg met ‘jy sien’. Ek het soveel aandag gegee aan elke woord wat hy sê dat ek dit vanselfsprekend sou oplet. Hy het ’n manier gehad om almal met die grootste respek aan te spreek, maak nie saak wie hulle was nie, en selfs sy woordkeuse het dié respek oorgedra. Die manier waarop hy sy sinne begin het, het op niks negatiefs gedui nie. Dit was maar net ’n gewoonte en sy manier om enige sin te begin.

Nadat ons by die geleentheid aangekom het, het baie mense om die president begin saamdrom. Die veiligheidsmense het dit baie moeilik gevind om die mense van hom weg te hou en vir hom ’n pad te baan in die rigting van die deur. By die deur het Haar Majesteit hom ingewag. President Mandela het my soos volg aan haar voorgestel: ‘U Majesteit, hierdie is my sekretaresse, Zelda la Grange.’ Ek was nie regtig sy sekretaresse nie, en ek het rêrig nie gedink sy gee om wie of wat ek is nie. Maar tot my groot verbasing het sy belangstelling in my getoon en gevra hoe lank ek al vir die president werk. Sy is een van die mooiste vroue wat ek nog ontmoet het en sy het die statuur van ’n ware koningin. Sy beweeg grasieus en ek moes myself knyp om te keer dat ek na haar staar. Ek het ’n koningin ontmoet!

Min het ek geweet dat ’n groter verrassing binne vir my sou wag. Die veiligheidsmense het ons na die hooftafel toe gelei. Ek het nog nooit soveel chaos in ’n skare teëgekom nie en het my bes probeer om

so na as moontlik aan die president te bly. Ek was verward deur die mense wat so teen ons vasdruk en verhoed dat ons vrylik beweeg. En dan was daar nog die veiligheidsmense wat 'n kringetjie om ons gevorm het. Almal wou aan die president raak of hom van naby bekyk. Eers toe hy en die koningin agter hul stoele in die saal stelling inneem, het mense begin bedaar en gereed gemaak om self te gaan sit. Ek het omgedraai en vir die veiligheidsmense gevra waarheen ek moes gaan, want ek het op hulle staatgemaak vir leiding en om my te wys wat ek moes doen. Hulle het my stoel vir my gewys, reg langs die koningin s'n. Ek het gebloos en bloed deur elke spier in my lyf voel pomp. Wat is die kanse tog dat ek ooit langs 'n koningin sou sit? Nul. Zero. Wat sou ek vir haar sê? Wat moes ek doen? Ek kon nie eens my kitskursus in etiket onthou nie. Ek het nie geweet watter mes en vurk om eerste te gebruik nie. Êrens in my agterkop het ek my ma iets hoor sê soos 'begin van buite af'. Goed, dan is daai enetjie uitgestryk. Maar tog, hierdie kan mos nie gebeur nie. Ek het vir die veiligheidspersoon gesê dit moet 'n fout wees. Intussen het die president en die koningin gaan sit en ek het nog senuweeagtig probeer plan maak om weg te kom, want toe was ek die enigste een in die vertrek wat nog verward rondstaan.

Die president het na my gekyk op 'n manier wat sê: 'Zelda, gaan sit.' Ek kon hom nie in die oë kyk nie. Myne was vol paniek asof ek wou sê: 'Help my, sê ek moet weggaan.' Maar hy het geknik en gewys ek moet gaan sit. Toe gaan sit ek. Die president en koningin het oor ditjies en datjies gesels. En ek het geen idee wie aan die ander kant langs my gesit het nie. Die persoon kon net sowel kaal of dood gewees het, ek sou dit nie agtergekom het nie. Ek het die patroontjie op die tafeldoek met my oë gevolg en later my hand op die tafel gesit en die lyntjies daarvan met my vinger nagetrek. Ek het gehoop ek lyk ontspanne, maar binne my was ek aan 't sterf van spanning en senuwees. Ek het geweet ek is veronderstel om my elmboog van die tafel af te hou. Ek kon nie meer my onbeholpenheid wegsteek nie en het gedink as ek my elmboë op die tafel neersit, sal dit my geanker laat voel. Vir my om langs 'n koningin te sit, het sekerlik teen protokol ingedruis. Selfs ek het dit geweet.

Die koningin het na my toe gedraai en met my begin praat. Ek het geglimlag en verby haar na die president gekyk en my oë het weer

gesê: ‘Goed, Meneer die President, nou moet u my help.’ Ek was ’n bietjie vies vir hom omdat hy my nie red nie, maar hy het net geglimlag en duidelik nie opgemerk hoe angstig ek is nie. Die koningin het my oor die politieke situasie in die land begin uitvra, waar ek grootgeword het, ensovoorts. Ek kan nie onthou wat ek gesê het nie, maar ek weet ek moes soos ’n ewige optimis geklink het, want ek het aanvaar as ’n mens saam met die president is, moet jy positief oor die toekoms van Suid-Afrika klink. Ek het regtig nie geweet waarvan ek praat nie en was nie eens seker wat ek dink nie: of ek regtig ’n toekoms gesien het vir Suid-Afrika en die rigting waarheen ons beweeg het. My gevoel oor die nuwe Suid-Afrika het nog net tot op ’n plek ontwikkel waar ek nogal van ons president begin hou het.

Op daardie oomblik het tyd tot my redding gekom. Die verrigtinge het begin en ná die koningin se toespraak was dit die president se beurt. Hy het bly sit en die mikrofoon is aan hom oorhandig. Ek het sy toespraak vir hom aangegee, hy het sy leesbril neergesit en begin lees. Ek het gewonder hoekom hy sy bril sou nodig hê as hy dit nie gebruik nie. Nadat hy die toespraak afgesluit het, het hy die papier vir my teruggegee en hardop gesê: ‘Dankie, darling.’ Sy woorde het van dankbaarheid en bedagsaamheid getuig. Ek is nie daaraan gewoond dat enigiemand my ‘darling’ noem nie. Ek het later besef dit is net ’n troetelnaampie. Hy het baie vroue so genoem. Wanneer ’n vrou of ’n vreemdeling my ‘darling’ noem, het ek nog altyd gevoel hulle sien neer op my. Maar hoekom sou dit enigiemand pla as Nelson Mandela jou ‘darling’ noem? Ek het bloed na my kop toe voel vloei en ek was skaam en geskok. Ek het amper gevoel soos ’n tiener wat haar kop wegdraai wanneer haar ma haar in die openbaar probeer soen. En ’n bietjie verleë oor die deernisvolle aandag. Ek het wel gedink ek het my plig gedoen en ek was reg om te ontspan en te begin eet.

Ons het omtrent vyf minute vir ons kos gewag, toe sê die president: ‘Zelda, ek dink dis tyd vir ons om te gaan.’ Die seremoniemeester het aangekondig dat die president op pad was en toe is ons daar uit. Mettertyd het ek besef hy hou nie daarvan om uit te eet nie. Hy was gek na die kos wat tuis vir hom voorberei is deur die Xhosa-sjefs, Xoliswa en Gloria, wat lank in sy diens was. En daarom het hy selde by openbare geleenthede geëet.

Op pad na die motor toe het iemand ons genader met ’n eksemplaar van die president se outobiografie, *Long Walk to Freedom.* Die veiligheidsmense het hom weggekeer, maar die man het aangedring en wel by die president self uitgekom. Hy kon nie regtig nee sê nie. Nadat hy die boek geteken het, het hy dit aan ’n veiligheidsman oorhandig en in die rigting van die motor beweeg. Toe ek omkyk, het die veiligheidsman die bladsy met die president se handtekening uitgeskeur en vir die man gesê hy moenie bevele verontagsaam nie. Ek was diep geskok. Min het ek geweet dat ek later ook een van die mense sou word wat ten alle koste orde sou wou handhaaf, hoewel ek nooit so ver gegaan het om enige bladsye uit iemand se boek te skeur nie.

Op pad huis toe het ek vir die president gesê ek dink dit was onvanpas om my langs die koningin te laat sit. Hy het geglimlag en gesê: ‘Toemaar, dis in die haak.’ Dit het my nog meer senuweeagtig gemaak. Dit kon hom glad nie van stryk bring nie. By die huis het hy my ingenooi vir koffie, maar ek wou net die pad terug Pretoria toe vat. Alles was te veel om te hanteer. Hy het daarop aangedring dat die veiligheidsmense my huis toe moet neem, maar ek het hulle omgepraat om dit te los. Hulle was moeg en ek wou beslis nie hê enigeen moes agter my aanry huis toe nie. Toe ek later meer geleenthede saam met die president bygewoon het, sou hy daarop aandring dat die veiligheidsmense my huis toe volg. Ons het altyd ingestem, maar ons het ons ooreenkoms verbreek die oomblik wanneer ons by die deur uit was.

In die winter van 1995 is die president uitgenooi na Swellendam in die Wes-Kaap, ’n Afrikaanse dorpie op die Tuinroete waar hy die vryheid van die dorp sou ontvang. Dit was die dorp se manier om die president te vereer as ’n teken van eenheid. Die meeste inwoners van die dorp is Afrikaners. Die president het die eerbetoon aanvaar en ’n paar dae voor die geleentheid aangekondig hy wil hê ek moet hom vergesel. Hy het my die vorige dag ontbied na Genadendal, sy ampswoning in Kaapstad. Toe ek daar aankom, het hy gesê ek moet sit. Genadendal is die naam van ’n klein bruin Afrikaanse gemeenskap op die Wes-Kaapse platteland. Hy het die naam vir sy amptelike blyplek aangeneem as eerbetoon aan dié gemeenskap.

Hy het aangekondig dat hy sy Afrikaans wil oefen en dat ek hom

met die uitspraak moes help. Sy hele toespraak was in Afrikaans. Hy het sonder seremonie weggespring en begin lees. Eers kon ek dit nie oor my hart kry om hom reg te help nie en hy sou elke nou en dan opkyk vir my goedkeuring. Ek het soos 'n regte onderwyser geknik en die feit verpes dat ek soos sy meerdere moes optree. Al is ek gevra om hom te help, was die situasie so tipies van die apartheidsjare waar wit mense as toesighouers oor swart mense moes optree en die swart mense altyd hul goedkeuring moes vra. Ek kon ook nie regtig alles verstaan wat hy lees nie en ek moes harder konsentreer. Toe wou hy die toespraak 'n tweede keer deurlees. Ek het ingestem. Wie sou nie? Maar hierdie keer het ek die moed bymekaargeskraap om hom op 'n paar puntjies reg te help. Dit het gelyk asof die lesery hom nou meer ontsenu en hy het so elke dan en wan bo-oor sy leesbril geloer, en dié keer nie vir my goedkeuring nie, maar eerder vir my bevestiging. Ek het weer geknik.

Ons sou per helikopter na Swellendam reis, en dit sou vir my 'n eerste wees. Ek was senuweeagtig, maar ek het na die president se gesig gekyk en gesien hy was ontspanne in die groot militêre Oryx-helikopter. Ek het ook ontspan. Wit militêre loodse was in beheer van die tuig en ek het gewonder of hy hulle vertrou. Teen 1995 was daar nog min opgeleide swart vlieëniers wat in die getransformeerde militêre magte opgeneem kon word. Onderweg het ek aan sy toespraak gedink en gewonder of hy die woorde gaan onthou wat ons die vorige dag geoefen het. Ek was senuweeagtig om sy onthalwe, maar hy het ontspanne gelyk, asof hy na een of ander sosiale geleentheid op pad was.

Die mense van Swellendam het hom met ope arms ontvang en hy het daarop aangedring om eers tussen die gewone mense deur te stap. Toe 'n klein dogtertjie hom op die verhoog kom groet, het sy gesig en lyftaal warmte uitgestraal. Hy het Afrikaans met haar gepraat en sy het hom geantwoord, al was sy skaam. Die president het hul interaksie geniet en ek kon sien daar is 'n emosionele band tussen hom en die kind. Hy het sy toespraak gelewer en die woorde onthou waarmee ek hom gehelp het. Deur sy hele toespraak in Afrikaans te lewer, het hy na die gemeenskap uitgereik en almal se harte gewen.

Terug op kantoor in Pretoria, tydens een van die min geleenthede wat ek vir hom tee in sy kantoor bedien het, het hy my gevra om te

sit. Ek het nie geweet wat om te verwag nie. Die president het jou nie maklik gevra om by sy lessenaar te gaan sit nie. Ek het gedink ek is seker in die moeilikheid, en het probeer onthou wat ek die afgelope paar weke vir wie gesê het en waarom ek in die moeilikheid sou kon wees. Toe sê hy: 'Nee, jy sien, ek wil hê jy moet saam met my Japan toe gaan.'

My eerste gedagte was: Sou dit nie onvanpas wees vir ons twee om saam oorsee te reis nie? Toe dink ek, nee, nee, dis seker maar soos met ons eerste ontmoeting; ek verstaan net nie wat hy bedoel nie. Ek dink ek het geantwoord: 'Ekskuus, Meneer?'

Terwyl ek nog probeer om die inligting te verwerk, het hy sy versoek herhaal: 'Ek wil hê jy moet saam met my Japan toe gaan.'

Al waaraan ek kon dink om hierop te antwoord was: 'Baie dankie, Meneer die President, maar ek het nie op die oomblik geld om Japan toe te gaan nie.' Hy het uitgebars van die lag, waarskynlik omdat hy nie geweet het wat om te antwoord op sulke onnoselheid nie.

Hy het gesien hoe sy lagbui my verras, maar hy was gou weer bedaard en kon sy vraag herhaal. Hierdie keer met 'n stukkie kritieke inligting by: 'Ek wil hê jy moet as lid van my afvaardiging saam met my Japan toe gaan op 'n staatsbesoek.' Hy het verder gesê ek moet na professor Gerwel toe gaan, wat alles verder aan my sou verduidelik. Ek het hom bedank en uit sy kantoor gestap. Ek het daarna nie 'n woord vir Mary gesê nie en ek kan nie onthou of sy in haar kantoor was toe ek verbygestap het op pad na myne nie. Ek het by my lessenaar gaan sit en probeer om die gebeure te verwerk. Ek het nie geweet wat ek met die inligting moes maak wat nou in my kop was en wie ek volgende moes kontak nie. Die president het dit so maklik laat klink om met professor Gerwel te praat, maar hy was immers ons kantoorhoof en ek wou nie sommer by hom inbars en op antwoorde aandring nie. Ek het toe besluit om dit daar te laat en nooit met enigiemand daaroor te praat nie en te vergeet dit het ooit gebeur. Ek was seker dit was net 'n fout. Watter president sien die nodigheid van 'n tikster op 'n staatsbesoek?

'n Paar dae later het professor Gerwel by ons kantoor verbygekom op pad na die president en ons soos gewoonlik gegroet. Hy het by my tafel vir my gesê hy het met die president gepraat en die president het aan hom genoem dat ek by die afvaardiging ingesluit moes word. Ek

was senuweeagtig. Hy het gesê ek sou by die departement van buitelandse sake moes aansoek doen vir ’n paspoort en die naam van die persoon genoem met wie ek oor die nodige reëlings moes praat. Hy het ook gesê ’n ander vrou uit die Wes-Kaap sou by ons aansluit. Haar naam was Melissa Brink. Die president het by ’n openbare debat in die Wes-Kaap op ’n vergadering van die bruin gemeenskap op haar afgekom. Haar leergierigheid het hom beïndruk, asook die manier waarop sy die ANC uitgedaag het om aan haar die opleiding te bied wat haar ouers verwag het toe hulle vir die party gestem het. Na haar mening was die vordering te stadig en sy het die moed gehad om dit reguit vir die president te sê toe sy die geleentheid kry. Hy het gehou van die feit dat ’n jong mens so ernstig was oor haar opvoeding dat sy die moed gehad het om hom daaroor te bevraagteken.

Ek het geen idee gehad waarom ek saamgenooi is nie. Niemand anders het ook geweet nie. Wat ek regtig as ’n bonus beskou het, is die feit dat daar nie van my verwag is om enigiets te betaal nie, maar dat ek, inteendeel, ’n toelaag sou ontvang vir die reis. Toe ek hoor wat die bedrag is, het ek geskrik, want dit het soos ’n soort gevaartoelaag geklink. Ek dink ek het die beamptes by buitelandse sake mal gemaak met al my vrae, ’n duidelike teken van my gebrek aan ervaring. Ek het ook half skuldig gevoel teenoor Mary. Ek het nie geweet wie se plig dit was om haar in te lig dat ék deel van die afvaardiging sou wees nie. Ek het ook nie geweet wat my rol sou wees nie en ek is ongemaklik op ’n plek as ek nie weet wat van my verwag word nie. Sy was immers my regstreekse baas en nie die president nie.

Die dag het aangebreek waarop ek saam met die voorspan Japan toe moes vertrek. Ek dink nie ek was al ooit in my lewe so opgewonde nie. Ek was gewapen met my diplomatieke paspoort, pasgemaakte klere en gemanikuurde maniere waaraan my ma my herinner het. So het ek op my eerste oorsese besoek vertrek. Voor daardie dag het ek nooit die grense van Suid-Afrika oorgesteek nie. My eerste oorsese reis Japan toe was soos ’n sprokie.

Met ons aankoms in Tokio is ons deur amptenare van die ambassade verwelkom en na die Osaka Palace-hotel geneem. Ek het agtergekom die amptenare was net so in die war oor my rol as wat ek was. Mary het ’n dag later gearriveer en die gevoel tussen ons was stram. Sy was egter versigtig om nie op my tone te trap nie en het

geweet my teenwoordigheid was ’n regstreekse opdrag van die president. Ek het probeer uitwerk wie wat doen op ’n staatsbesoek, maar dit was nie maklik nie. Die veiligheidsmense en protokolbeamptes het ons omring en ek het gou aanklank gevind by ’n man van buitelandse sake, Johan Nieman. Hy het as my gids opgetree en dinge tot in die fynste besonderhede vir my verduidelik. Hy was ook die eerste mens wat vir my gevra het hoe ek op die reis beland het en wat my rol was. Ek het verduidelik ek is die tikster en dat ek geen idee gehad het wat my rol was nie, maar hy het my gerusgestel met die feit dat die president my en Melissa persoonlik uitgenooi het en dat ons nie moes toelaat dat enigiemand ons intimideer nie. Dit het my ’n bietjie beter laat voel.

Uit gesprekke met my kollegas op die reis het ek ’n idee begin kry hoekom ons daar was: Die Suid-Afrikaanse regering wou sy ekonomiese bande met Japan versterk. Ons is vergesel deur ’n paar ministers en dit het deurgeskemer wat op staatsbesoeke van mense op hulle vlak verwag word. Ek het stadig ’n politieke sin begin ontwikkel.

President Mandela moes ook die Japannese keiser ontmoet. Met ons aankoms by die paleis is ons aangesê om in ’n ry te staan. Die mees senior beamptes, die ministers naaste aan die president, en die res van ons in die volgorde van senioriteit tot by die mees junior beampte. Ek en Melissa was natuurlik laaste.

Ek het vir die eerste keer besef wat ek en Melissa daar maak. Sy is voorgestel as ’n bruin meisie van gemengde afkoms en ek as ’n Afrikaner. Ek het gekyk na my kollegas en besef ons verteenwoordig die hele spektrum van Suid-Afrika se mense. Ek was bly om deel daarvan te kon wees. Die president wou ’n lid van elke ras in sy span hê. Hy was vasbeslote om die wêreld te wys dat hy nie net versoening predik nie; dis iets waaroor hy so sterk gevoel het dat hy dié denkwyse ook in sy eie kantoor wou toepas. Hy wou homself daartoe verbind om eenheid in Suid-Afrika te bewerkstellig en dit moes die mense insluit wat die nouste met hom saamwerk.

Toe dit my beurt was om aan die keiser voorgestel te word, het die president gesê: ‘Hierdie is Zelda la Grange. Sy is my sekretaresse en ’n regte Afrikaner-Boeremeisie.’ Ek is nie seker of die keiser geweet het wat ’n Afrikaner-Boeremeisie is nie en hy het ’n bietjie verward gelyk, maar hoflik geglimlag terwyl hy my hand skud.

Ek het spoedig ontdek dat ek Afrikaans met die president kon praat wanneer ek nie seker was wat van my verwag word nie, en hy sou kalm aan my verduidelik hoe om die regte protokol te volg. Hyself is ook deur protokolbeamptes ingelig en wanneer hy gesien het ek steek vas, sou hy in Afrikaans vir my sê wat om te doen. Wanneer die president 'n ruskans gekry het, is ons na die gastehuis toe. Ander afgevaardigdes het inkopies gaan doen en besienswaardighede besoek, maar ek was te bang om rond te beweeg. Sê nou maar die president soek my en ek is nie daar nie? Dit was ondenkbaar. By die staatsbanket het ek 'n hele ent van hom af gesit, maar ek kon hom sien en ek het alles wat hy doen dopgehou.

Die lewe van gewone Suid-Afrikaners het nog steeds nie baie verander sedert president Mandela se inhuldiging in 1994 nie, hoewel daar 'n gevoel van optimisme was. Wanneer mense die president op televisie gesien het, het hulle gesien dat hy ander altyd hoflik groet, met respek en sonder vooroordeel. Die publiek het daarvan gehou. Ons ekonomie het gestabiliseer en beleggers het begin vertroue kry in die nuwe Suid-Afrika. Daar was egter 'n groot waterskeiding op pad in president Mandela se loopbaan as staatshoof. Dit was 'n geleentheid om vir die wêreld te wys Suid-Afrika kon oorleef en dat dit goed gaan met ons.

Die Wêreldbeker-rugbytoernooi is in Suid-Afrika aangebied. Rugby is steeds deur die meeste mense in die land as 'n 'wit sport' beskou, hoewel ek later sou uitvind dat swart mense, veral in die Oos-Kaap, dekades lank rugby gespeel het, maar as gevolg van apartheid nooit toegelaat is om professioneel deel te neem nie. Hulle kon nie eens op die pawiljoen saam met die wit mense sit nie. Rugby is 'n sportsoort wat deur meeste Afrikaners soos 'n godsdiens aangehang en ondersteun word, maar die spanne en die toeskouers was in die apartheidsjare amptelik tot wit mense beperk. Voor die Wêreldbekertoernooi het die keurders 'n bruin Afrikaanssprekende jong man vir die Springbokke gekies. Sy naam was Chester Williams.

Die president het die Springbokspan voor die toernooi by hul oefenkamp in die Wes-Kaap ontmoet. En op die dag van die openingswedstryd op Nuweland was hy daar om vir die span te skreeu. Toe Chester (of Chessie, soos ek hom later sou noem) op die veld draf, het die skare hom met 'n groot gejuig verwelkom. Hy was 'n driedrukker en op dié manier het hy wit mense se ondersteuning

verseker.

Ek het nooit kon dink die president het iets van rugby geweet nie, maar hy het, en hy het waarskynlik die spelreëls beter geken as ek. By die aanvangswedstryd van die toernooi, toe die Springbokke teen Australië se Wallabies uitdraf, het hy langs die president van die Suid-Afrikaanse Rugbyunie, doktor Louis Luyt, gesit. Aan die ander kant van hom was die Australiese premier. Die president was opgeruimd en het 'n weddenskap met die premier aangegaan. Hy het gesê die wenner van dié wedstryd sou die wêreldkampioen word, en dat die een wat die weddenskap verloor vir die ander een 'n kis wyn moes skenk. Albei lande het 'n trotse wyntradisie. Suid-Afrika was die wenspan en sou uiteindelik die toernooi op 'n geskiedkundige wyse in Johannesburg verower. Ná die Springbokke se oorwinning is die wyn uit Australië by ons afgelewer en dit is aan liefdadigheid geskenk vir geldinsameling.

'n Paar dae voor die eindstryd het ek gehoor Mary bel rond en vra vir 'n Springboktrui, maar ek het nie geweet wat sy daarmee wou doen nie. Toe ons mekaar aan die einde van die laaste werksdag voor die eindstryd groet, het sy vir my gesê die president sou deur die loop van die dag in 'n Springboktrui op die veld verskyn. Ek het gedink dis 'n oorspronklike idee maar het nie veel verder daaroor nagedink nie.

Mary het vir my twee kaartjies vir die eindstryd gegee en ek het my pa genooi om saam te gaan. Ons was vroeg by die stadion. Die skare was opgewonde en die atmosfeer plofbaar. Kort voor die afskop was daar 'n aankondiging: 'Dames en here, verwelkom meneer Nelson Mandela, die president van die Republiek van Suid-Afrika.' Hy het op die veld gestap, omring deur lyfwagte en rugby-amptenare. Die skare het gejuig toe hulle sy naam hoor, maar toe hulle hom in die Groen-en-Goud sien, het hulle 'Nelson, Nelson, Nelson!' begin skreeu. Aanvanklik het ek gedink dis oneerbiedig om die president van 'n land op sy voornaam te noem. Maar toe kyk ek om my rond en my waarneming was dat die mense nie daaroor nagedink het nie, maar bloot uit opgewondenheid begin skreeu het toe hulle die swart president in sy Springboktrui en -keps op die veld sien loop. Mense het trots gevoel, maak nie saak wat hul politieke oortuigings was nie. Hy het albei spanne gegroet en die volksliedere is gesing.

Dit was 'n spannende wedstryd en ek en my pa het soos ou

rugbypêlle op en af gespring van opgewondenheid. Die spanne was gelykop toe die eindfluitjie blaas. Toe, in beseringstyd, jaag Joel Stransky 'n skepskop deur die pale en beklink Suid-Afrika se oorwinning. Die skare het ontplof. Mense het mekaar omhels en gedruk; vreemdelinge het mekaar gesoen. Ander het selfs in trane van blydskap uitgebars. Vir 'n paar uur daarna het ons verlede glad nie saakgemaak nie. Ons was kleurblind en mense het die geleentheid aangegryp om as Suid-Afrikaners saam fees te vier. As gevolg van apartheid is Suid-Afrika nie toegelaat om aan die eerste twee Wêreldbekertoernooie deel te neem nie. Ons kon eers ná ons eerste demokratiese verkiesing ten volle na die internasionale sportarena terugkeer.

Die dra van 'n Springboktrui op die dag van die eindstryd was een van die beste strategiese besluite van Nelson Mandela se ampstermyn as president. Die wêreld het Suid-Afrika as 'n verenigde nasie gesien. Hy het deel geword van iets wat tot in daardie stadium as 'n wit man se sport beskou is, en deur daardie groot stap op hul emosionele werf te neem, het hy die grense van ras en kleur ver oorgesteek en die mense se harte geraak. Hy was trots op die Springbokke, maar ook op elke landsburger. Hy was saam met hulle bly, en ook bly vir hul onthalwe. Wanneer hy gesê het sport kan mense verenig, al is daar hoë skeidsmure tussen hulle, sou hy gereeld na hierdie dag verwys, en na my beskeie mening het hy nie genoeg erkenning aan sy eie geniale optrede gegee nie.

Kort daarna het die president die Springbokspan uitgenooi vir middagete en dit is waar sy sterk verbintenis met rugby begin het. Hy het baie van die Springbokkaptein, Francois Pienaar, gehou, maar hy was net so trots op al die ander spelers wat Suid-Afrika nie net 'n wenspan gemaak het nie, maar 'n wen-nasie. Vir jare daarna het die president rugby geesdriftig gevolg totdat hy begin kritiek kry het dat hy te behep was daarmee en meer aandag aan ander sportsoorte moes gee. Hy moes altyd probeer om almal tevrede te stel. So belangrik soos dit was om rugby en rugbyspelers se guns te wen, was dit later belangrik om 'n gesonder afstand te skep.

Later, in 1998, het doktor Luyt president Mandela voor die hof gedaag om 'n kommissie van ondersoek teen te staan. Die president het geglo rugby se sake moes ondersoek word ná beskuldigings van

nepotisme en rassisme. Luyt het die president se regte ingevolge die Grondwet bevraagteken en gereken die Suid-Afrikaanse Rugbyunie was ’n onafhanklike liggaam. In die *Sunday Times* van 16 Augustus 1998 is Luyt beskryf as iets soortgelyk aan ’n krygsheer en iemand wie die publiek ‘lief was om te haat’. Steve Tshwete was toe die minister van sport en ontspanning en hy was bekommerd oor die president se besluit om sy eie verdediging waar te neem tydens die hofsaak. Die president se prokureurs en raadgewers het aangebied om hom te verteenwoordig, maar hy het geweier.

Regter William de Villiers het die hofverrigtinge gelei. Toe die president op 19 Maart 1998 by die hof instap, het hy reguit na die aanklaers toe geloop en elkeen van hulle se hand geskud, doktor Luyt inkluis. Daarna het hy sy eie regspan gegroet en gaan sit. Ek was vies vir die president en het gedink as hierdie mense die vermetelheid het om hom aan te kla, hoekom sal hy vriendelik met hulle wil wees? Toe ek dit in teetyd aan hom noem, het hy vir my ’n les geleer wat ek nooit sal vergeet nie: ‘Onthou, die manier waarop jy iemand benader, bepaal hoe hy jou gaan hanteer.’ As jy jou vyand ontwapen, is die stryd half gewonne. Sy optrede het hulle beslis van stryk gebring, maar hulle het vinnig herstel en toe met hul aanvalle op hom begin. Die ander ding wat hy gesê het, is dat jy nooit jou vyande moet toelaat om die terme van die stryd te bepaal nie. As hulle jou dus in die hof wil pak, moet jy hulle neutraliseer deur vir hulle te wys dis nie ’n persoonlike saak nie en deur vriendelik met hulle te wees, verkry jy ’n sielkundige voorsprong. Ek het gehoor wat hy sê, maar vir my het die saak baie persoonlik en lelik gelyk.

Hulle het hom uiteindelik na die getuiebank geroep en hy het daarop aangedring om te staan terwyl hulle hom ondervra, al het die regter gesê hy mag sit. Die aanklaer het die vrae op verskillende maniere aan hom gestel, en dan sou die president sê: ‘U Edele, ek glo meneer Maritz het daardie vraag klaar gevra en ek het geantwoord.’ Die regter sou dan die aanklaer vra om voort te gaan, en die president sou weer sê hy het die vraag klaar geantwoord nadat die aanklaer dieselfde vraag drie keer op verskillende maniere aan hom gestel het. Daar was spanning in die hof en die president het hom begin vervies. Hy was self ’n opgeleide regsman en dié deel van hom het nou na vore gekom. Hy was skitterend in die hof, al was die vrae onregverdig.

Met etenstyd het ons sy kos van Mahlamba Ndlopfu laat kom en hy het in stilte gesit en eet. Hy het gepeins en ’n strategie vir die volgende sessie bedink. Ná ete was hy terug in die getuiebank. Ek het hard probeer om myself in te hou, want die aanklaers het my gewalg. Ek was meer as een keer lus om te sê wat ek dink. Ek het ook ’n paar keer na my asem gesnak wanneer hulle probeer het om hom te verneder. Hoe het tye verander! Doktor Luyt was ’n stoere Afrikaner, en nou was ek aan die president se kant. Nie omdat ek vir hom gewerk het nie, maar omdat ek geglo het hy staan vir wat reg is, en dat hy as president die volste reg gehad het om ’n kommissie van ondersoek aan te vra. Nadat die verrigtinge afgesluit is, het ek geen geheim van my gevoelens gemaak nie. Die president was kalm, soos altyd, en het probeer om nie emosioneel te raak soos wat ek duidelik was nie.

Die regering, en dus president Mandela, het die saak verloor en appèl aangeteken. Die beslissing is later deur die appèlhof omgekeer, maar teen daardie tyd het die kommissie van ondersoek sy fut verloor en nie sy werksaamhede begin nie.

Terwyl ons nog besig was om te herstel van die wonde van ons nederlaag in die hof, het ons begin gereed maak vir ’n staatsbesoek van president Jacques Chirac van Frankryk. ’n Groot staatsbanket is in Johannesburg beplan. Die president het my gebel en gesê ek moet seker maak die protokolafdeling nooi doktor Luyt en sy hele regspan uit na die banket. Ek het ingestem, maar toe hy die foon neersit, het ek gedink oor my dooie liggaam! Ek gaan aspris hiervan vergeet. Hoekom sou ons mense nooi wat die president in die openbaar verkleineer het? Hy het nie ’n tikkie bitterheid teenoor die wit mense gehad nie, ondanks apartheid. En tog het hulle so hard probeer om hom af te kraak – nie agter toe deure nie, maar in die openbaar. Hoe kan ek deel hê aan ’n uitnodiging aan hulle om die banket by te woon wat elke mens in Suid-Afrika graag sou wou bywoon? Ek het my plig versuim en nooit vir die protokol-afdeling gesê wat die president versoek het nie. Die volgende dag het hy my weer gebel en spesifiek gevra: ‘Het jy vir doktor Luyt en sy regspan genooi?’

En ek het gesê: ‘Nee, Khulu, nog nie’. Ek het my planne stil gehou en was nog steeds vasbeslote om daarvan te vergeet. Maar die volgende dag het hy weer gebel en my weer herinner, en ek het besef

hy sou nie vergeet nie, en as hy na hulle by die banket sou soek, wat natuurlik gebeur het, sou ek in groot moeilikheid wees omdat ek hulle nie genooi het nie. Toe hy hulle by die banket gaan groet, was ek geskok daaroor. Ondanks alles was hy so innemend soos altyd en het hy hulle soos ou vriende verwelkom. My ego se duurste les was dít: Só gaan 'n mens met jou vyand om.

5

Travelling with a President

In 1996 the President asked me to accompany him again, this time on his state visit to France. I was excited having the opportunity to visit France, obviously, because of my ancestral history. The only difference this time was that I was the only secretary to accompany him and it was therefore my first fully fledged working state visit. In Paris a lady visited him and I was suspicious about her presence. She arrived at the guest house with our Ambassador to France, Barbara Masekela. Barbara escorted her straight to the President's suite in the guest house. The President's suite had a dining room, its own lounge and ample space befitting for a President. But Barbara soon left, without the visitor, and the door to the President's suite was closed. I knew that was never allowed – that a door be closed when he was alone with a female. I rushed up to Parks Mankahlana, the Presidential spokesperson, and with panic in my voice announced that the door was closed and the lady was still inside. Parks told me it was Mrs Graça Machel, the widow of the late President Samora Machel from Mozambique. What crossed my mind first was: Oh hell, I don't know all this history, and then: Well, they've closed the door and I may be in trouble about it.

It was one of the very few occasions that Parks was irritated with me and told me 'leave it'. So I did.

Before we left for a public reception, the President called me and formally introduced me to Mrs Machel. And he said something I remembered and tried to adhere to for years to follow: 'This is Aunt Graça Machel. She is my friend. We are going to this event now and I want you to stay with her at all times. You are not allowed to lose sight of her at any time and I need you to take care of her.' That made

me nervous because I didn't know how I was supposed to look after both of them at this event. Somehow I managed.

After we returned to South Africa it was leaked to the media that Mrs Machel and the President were in a relationship. I was shocked at first when I saw it in the Sunday papers, fearing that someone might think that I leaked it to the media, but Parks later told me it was deliberately leaked.

* * *

On Wednesday, 12 February 1997 a debate followed in Parliament after the President's State of the Nation address a few days before. The debate was about racism and minority groups accusing the government of the aforementioned. The President said during his debate:

> May I challenge each and every one of those honourable members to come out with me now, not to fight [laughter] but to show them evidence which will disprove all their propaganda. However before I refer to that, I was asked the same question that has been raised by my friend here, F. W. de Klerk: 'Why are you applying racism in reverse and letting our people down, punishing the Afrikaners?'
>
> I said, 'Very well. Can you give me some statistics? How many Afrikaners have been dismissed? When? Who replaced them?' He said: 'I do not have the facts with me.' I said: 'I am very surprised that a professor should put a question like that to the President of the country without facts.' I said I would give him time and asked how long he needed before he could supply me with that evidence. That was the last time I saw him [laughter].
>
> I want to say that whilst we are empowering those who have been discriminated against, we are acting sensitively to the people who were there before we took over. Just outside this Chamber is Superintendent Riaan Smuts, who comes from the apartheid regime. I have retained him. I have two white secretaries from the old regime, typical boeremeisies [laughter]. They are Elize Wessels from Kakamas and Zelda la Grange from George. Those honourable members can go through my staff.

I laughed when I heard of this. Elize was never from Kakamas and well, I've never been from George, although for years later Madiba

still believed I was from George. My grandparents and father were from that region and because I told him that we often go there he accepted that I was from George, which is a well-known sizeable town in that area. It worked for him so I left it at that. Years later Mrs Machel corrected him one day and then the story disappeared. He appeared disappointed in his own story.

After this debate I was approached by a journalist from an Afrikaans women's magazine in South Africa called Rooi Rose (Red Roses). They wanted to do a feature about a white female bodyguard and wanted to include me as one of the white ladies around the President. At first I said no, but it came to the President's attention that I had been asked and did not want to participate, and he called me into his office and instructed me to do it. He told me he wanted me to participate when asked. I was part of his Government of National Unity, and he would not succeed if he preached to the world something he was not operating in his close environment. By now I understood what the President wanted with me. It was becoming more than a job for me. I was becoming dependent emotionally on him, while he afforded me the opportunities of a lifetime. I was not skilled for everything he asked me to do, but he wanted to ensure that a white, young Afrikaner, who epitomized the community, remained close to him.

I looked forward to every opportunity to spend time with the President. He was kind and always interested about my well-being. That made me even more committed to support his efforts and I made an effort to ensure that I was diligent in every possible way. But the fact that he would contact me directly and involve me in his affairs caused some tension in the office. I tried to remain in Cape Town as much as possible, even during the recess in Parliament, for the sake of peace, though I was promoted to acting assistant private secretary in March 1997.

My parents were intrigued by my commitment and change of heart towards the President. They sensed that I adored my new boss and when I spoke of him it was with fondness. My dad appeared sceptical but my mother embraced and encouraged the loyalty I was expressing. I didn't discuss work much at home but they saw that I was completely focused and dedicated to my job. They hardly ever saw me and when they did, I slept most of the time. Whenever I wasn't at work, or with the President, I slept. I no longer went out with friends and I alienated myself from the social scene, for reasons both

intentional and unintentional. I wanted to avoid being constantly quizzed about my job. Having very little free time I wanted to isolate myself in that short space of time to digest whatever was happening at work, to internalize and process and plan, but also to provide myself with the space to accommodate the changes that were happening within me. When I now look back over those nineteen years the days are all faded into one large chunk of life. It was at such a pace that I find it difficult to remember individual or isolated incidents. There was little time to ever digest and even though I was proud, grateful and totally committed, my work absorbed my entire life.

I was embracing the new South Africa through serving the President. I was changing from within and in general felt more tolerant and respectful towards people despite the differences of the colour of our skin, our cultural or political beliefs and the texture of our hair. It was something my friends and some family found difficult to comprehend because they had not been exposed to the same diversities that I had been exposed to. We were not accustomed to interracial relationships in South Africa, whether platonic, romantic or professional of nature. We still operated and lived separated in our clusters of comfort. It was starting to be problematic having conversations with friends and family as I was growing to accept and embrace the diversity of people. I often walked away from conversations with friends thinking that some of the black and brown people I worked with were much more intelligent than most people we as white friends knew, yet some of my friends maintained their position of superiority over anyone who was not white. I had grown intolerant of people who didn’t open themselves for change, but at the same time I realized I was privileged because of my closeness to the President and exposure to non-racialism.

People often ask me: ‘Did you keep notes of your experiences?’ And I think to myself: With what time and energy was I suppose to do that? They say: ‘You must have been to the most spectacular places’, and I think: Can’t remember. Then they say: ‘You don’t have kids and aren’t married’, and to this day I calmly smile and respond appropriately but think: Where and when could you imagine that could have happened in the last nineteen years? Your being becomes consumed by the job and you wake up worrying and stressing about what lies ahead, not contemplating anything else that would resemble ‘normality.’

*   *   *

It was around this time that my relationship with the President took a step forward. Even though I was in Cape Town most of the time, I knew that he was negotiating with Laurent Kabila and the incumbent President of what was then known as Zaire, now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition to attending to the duties of a President that included dealing with domestic affairs, keeping opposition politicians at bay, debating changes of legislation and so on, the President would fly off to Zaire in the morning, be back at night and the next day have an incoming state visit to attend to. He did his duties without ever cancelling or failing his obligations, yet he was determined too that it was not only South Africa that had to benefit from our democracy. Africa had to succeed as a continent too and he was devoted to bringing about a regeneration of the continent at the same time.

The DRC is a country rich in resources on the west coast of Africa. But the country and its people were impoverished as a result of greed – that of the ruler and dictator for more than twenty years, President Mobutu Sese Seko – and an ongoing civil war in the region. The President's intention was to get Laurent Kabila and Mobutu to meet on neutral ground and for them to start negotiations to enable Mobutu to step down in a dignified manner and hand over power to Kabila to effectively run the country on new terms to benefit its people, hoping that a free, fair and democratic election would follow. Kabila was threatening to overthrow the government and take over by violent means, and to ensure stability in the region it was in the best interest of all concerned that a peaceful transition be negotiated. President Mobutu, who was sixty-six at the time and suffering from prostate cancer, said he would never bow to Kabila, but international pressure was increasing.

To prepare for this meeting a South African navy ship, the SAS Outeniqua, was sent to anchor in international waters off the coast of Zaire to provide that neutral ground for the affected parties to meet. For days the media was dominated by reports that Mobutu refused to meet Kabila on the ship. Once they had both agreed to meet, the President flew off to Pointe Noire in Zaire with the Presidential plane, the Falcon 900, to attend and facilitate the meeting. He was scheduled to return late the same night.

My duties at that stage included the tasking of the Presidential plane: to provide airforce staff with details of departure and arrival

times, passengers on board, food to be consumed during return flights and return times. Meticulous detail. In turn, they would provide me with flight times and from there an arrival time at each side could be determined and the programme for the day could be negotiated. The President specifically didn't take a secretary with him on that particular trip due to the sensitivities of the talks and the fact that there were only men on board the SAS Outeniqua. He probably also had a premonition that things would not go according to plan. They arrived in Pointe Noire and were taken by helicopter to the vessel. And there he started preparing himself for the meeting.

I was usually in constant contact with the pilots of the plane so as to establish what time they departed and to enable me then to provide an expected arrival time back in South Africa to all parties concerned.

On that night it didn't happen. No one contacted me and I contacted our pilots to enquire about their plans. They informed me that they were still waiting for word from the President but that it was already 9 p.m. and they didn't have hope of him returning that night. Then luckily the President called me and told me that neither Kabila nor Mobutu had arrived for the negotiations, but he'd sent word to them through our embassy that he was waiting. The President had a way of instructing his peers to do things in which they felt obliged to adhere to. And he was waiting for the two to respond. He told me that he was going to spend the night on the vessel and wait for them to arrive the following day, but if they didn't arrive the next day he was going to return. I remember asking him whether I should not help to call them from this side and he laughed but said it wasn't necessary.

He then asked me to inform Mrs Machel, which I did. I called the Director General of our office, Prof. Gerwel, every time I received an update, and then also the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of the Defence Force. To me, they all had to be informed that our President was stuck out on one of the navy's ships on the open seas. It was just common sense. I had no training in dealing with matters of this gravity but did what I thought would be expected of me. The President also asked me to call him back and give Mrs Machel's response. I called back and said that she sends all her love and hopes that he is OK and sleeps well. When I called to the only satellite phone in the vessel, a young man answered and I had to try to convince him why it was necessary for this Afrikaans woman to speak to the President. They found it suspicious.

The pilots were accommodated in either a hotel or they slept in

the plane, I don't know, but they were informed that there was no flight back that night. The next morning I called again. This time to inform the President that the plane crew didn't take personal items to stay overnight and they had to return to South Africa to go and regroup or to send up a relief crew. They were also working against time as aviation regulations didn't make provision for them to be on standby for that long and soon they would not be allowed to fly, and there would be no relief crew to return the President home.

I called again, and again the young man answered the phone and we started being acquainted. I then asked him to call the President, which he did, and the President came down the stairs to take the call. 'Yes darling?' he responded. By then I had started calling the President 'Khulu', the abbreviated version of the Xhosa word for Grandpa. It was only in formal situations where protocol was required where we would call him Mr President. Everyone else called him either Madiba, or 'Tata' (Father) or President Mandela. I had asked Parks for a word that would help me be at ease with him a bit more and he suggested 'Khulu'.

I explained the situation but then said something stupid, again. 'Can we send you some toiletries and clothes at least?' His response was, 'That would be very thoughtful of you but also send me newspapers.' Always newspapers. He used to read all five daily newspapers in his region every day, including those in Afrikaans. He often said that the Afrikaans papers reported in a much more accurate way than the English papers and I guess he meant it is because Afrikaans is such a descriptive and expressive language.

We sent his toiletries and newspapers back with the plane that returned almost immediately after it dropped off its crew, refuelled, and took on fresh crew and food for the return flight. The fresh crew knew somehow that it may still be a day or two before they returned so they took their own personal items too.

The President never carried telephone numbers with him, but by now he knew my number by heart from constantly calling me (which is also why the cellphone company Vodacom always allocated me some simple numbers to make it easy for the President to remember the number whenever I had to change it). So while he was on the ship he kept calling me to call people, ask questions and then to call him back with responses. Two days later Mobutu arrived. It appeared that he and Kabila were willing to negotiate a peaceful settlement, but a fortnight later the Zairean army informed Mobutu that they could no

longer protect him. He fled the country and Kabila declared himself head of state and suspended the country's constitution.

Upon his return to Cape Town, the President made a point of calling me into his office to commend me for the support while he was on the SAS Outeniqua. I felt proud of keeping things going during that time, of course with his guidance. Though I was puzzled he could think it would have been any different. It was thoughtful of him though. It was the moment, perhaps, that it was clear that he relied on me, and clear that I would always be there.

* * *

One day Mary sent me to fetch dry cleaning for her. I'm not the type of person who minds doing anything for anyone as long as it remains within the law. It is probably as a result of my Calvinistic upbringing: we serve, we obey, and we are humble to anyone in a more senior position than us. We basically do what we get told.

I was on my way out of the office when the President was on his way in, and our paths crossed. By now we had established a good working relationship and we were comfortable with one another. He asked me where I was heading and I told him that I was running an errand for Mary. He was furious. 'How can you do that?' I responded that I didn't mind at all. He insisted that it wasn't proper and I ended up begging him to let it go, like one would do with your father to save a sibling from being disciplined, and realized that I shouldn't have told him. I was really surprised that this angered him. The President liked strong women but Mary was perhaps too strong. He never liked people telling him what to do. I discovered he wanted to be given input but in a consultative manner rather than being prescribed, which one can understand of a person that had been imprisoned for twenty-seven years, following the authorities' schedule of when to eat, sleep, exercise and put the lights out – it was his way of winning back the little freedom he had, by at least feeling in control of his own life.

He called me to his house shortly after this and by now I was driving to Houghton myself – as long as I didn't have to go anywhere else in Johannesburg, I was fine to drive between Pretoria and Houghton, not being familiar with Johannesburg and its surroundings. This time when I arrived, he handed me some letters to prepare for him but then asked me to sit in his lounge and told me one of the most valuable things ever: 'There is no room for cowards here. If you

are going to be a coward you are not going to last here for very long. I cannot always defend you so you need to defend yourself by doing what is right.' It was only when I drove home that I realized he was referring to the incident in the office that week and that he expected me not to simply take instructions but to question them. These words will remain with me for the rest of my life, and in later years, when he was indeed no longer able to defend me, they gave me strength in whatever battles I was facing.

And so on the President's insistence I had to be considered too when it came to international travel. Since the secretaries took turns to accompany him I now had to be added for consideration. Soon I was tasked to accompany him to India and Bangladesh, and then to England in the summer of 1997.

The President went to Oxford and I was overwhelmed by the beauty of the town and the real English countryside. Prince Charles attended the event at Jesus College at Oxford. This was after his divorce from Princess Diana had been announced and we were all a bit wary. The President however was his charming self and despite all the bad press about the Royals he was extremely courteous and respectful towards Prince Charles. The President didn't judge people.

Earlier that year Princess Diana paid a visit to Angola and South Africa. The President was hugely impressed by her gesture of visiting HIV/AIDS-infected patients in Angola and sitting on their beds while conversing with them. She was helping to destroy the stigma attached to people suffering from AIDS and he said, 'For a Princess to sit on AIDS patients' beds goes to show that people have nothing to fear but that we have to care for people with AIDS.' On the day that Princess Diana visited him at Genadendal, the official residence in Cape Town, the President arrived in his lounge with his slippers on. He had forgotten to put on his shoes and humbly apologized to Princess Diana once the entire room realized he had asked for his shoes to be brought from his room. The Princess wasn't fazed at all. The President had no trouble laughing at himself and sharing such small embarrassing moments with others.

I was increasingly struggling to marry my past and the present. I was a daughter of apartheid, yet I was supporting and serving the same man my Afrikaner compatriots warned me against. I was guided and taught so much by Parks Mankahlana, the Presidential spokesperson, and Tony Trew, the director of communications in our office, and one day I had the courage to go and tell them that I needed

to speak to someone to try and come to peace with myself about the way we lived when I grew up under apartheid laws, and the fact that I was so ignorant. They suggested I go and speak to the Reverend Beyers Naudé. I also met Ronnie Kasrils, who served in President Mandela's Cabinet and who had been an early leader in MK, the group that was responsible for the Church Street bombing in 1983, when we couldn't trace my father for some hours. I had these struggles within myself, not knowing what was right and wrong. Rev. Naudé started his career as a Dutch Reformed priest but later left the church when he spoke out against apartheid and was put under house arrest for several years as a result. Yet he had no bitterness. I knew a bit about him but it was limited to that he was seen as a 'sell-out' by many white people. Parks and Tony arranged for me to have tea with 'Oom Bey' (Uncle Bey) as he was fondly known.

I drove nervously on my own to Johannesburg to go and see him. I was met by his wife upon arrival and joined him in his sitting room. It felt similar to being received by my own grandparents – with love and hospitality, even though the Naudés had never met me and didn't know much about me. I told him my story and we conversed for about two hours about life in general and religion, and he emphasized to me that I should not put so much pressure on myself by wanting to take responsibility for everyone around me and what apartheid did, and that I should come to peace with the fact that this journey is probably part of my own awakening. We prayed before I left and I felt emotional. I was so grateful to God for the enormous opportunities in my life and all my blessings, yet it was the same God in my eyes that allowed apartheid to happen and Nelson Mandela to be locked up in a prison cell for twenty-seven years. My journey of discovery included questions about the role of organized religion, coming to the conclusion that my relationship with God is a personal issue for which only I can account within myself and to Him one day. Indeed, this journey has led me to some strange beliefs and I would argue with my mother about the creation of institutions by man but then claimed as if God created these.

* * *

Sometimes Mrs Machel accompanied us on visits abroad and sometimes she simply was too busy with her own work. By now she was becoming a prominent part of the President's life and the

President often boasted about the important work she was doing. She would often attend official functions but also spend time with him in private. I knew it made the President happy when she was around so I was fiercely protective over their private space and moments too.

Mrs Machel and I had a cautious relationship at first. The President had many duties to fulfil and targets he wanted to achieve, and in addition the world wanted him to be everywhere at the same time. His objectives were mainly focused on reconciliation and education but also bringing about stability in South Africa in a unified manner to ensure a favourable climate for the country to grow economically. I was often caught in the middle of having to ensure that he was satisfied with the pace at which he was working but then also setting enough time aside to be a husband.

I had to work many years to establish a solid working relationship with Mrs Machel. I didn't expect her to like me. It was my government and my people that brought down the plane in which her husband, Samora Machel, was killed in 1986. In later years, when we became much closer, I would often ask her and her children to recite the details around the events of his death. It was very hurtful but by arguing the events I think she also perhaps saw that I had a certain understanding for their pain and loss, something they appreciated. (Following Madiba's passing I also had the opportunity to see Samora Jnr's two boys, Samora III and Malick, for the first time in about ten years, and the resemblance to their grandfather was striking.)

The Machels are warm, hospitable, caring people and despite challenges we faced in the beginning we are close now. I have always been close to Mrs Machel's children. They say life takes a little time and a lot of relationship and indeed it took Mrs Machel and I a long time to build the relationship we have today, but we did with effort from both sides and I cannot imagine my life without her influence and the stability she brings about in my small world. I also admit that any two people work on a relationship and I had as much blame to take for the more difficult times as I wanted to give her.

At first I thought Mrs Machel was just asserting her position as wife in the President's life and it felt as if her expectations of us were too high. But then one noticed how she made the President smile. She awakened his senses again. She allowed him to live. She made him dance and see the beauty in flowers, appreciate good music and see the wonder in every sunset and every sunrise. On many of our travels she insisted that we all watch the sunset together, something he

missed for so many years, being locked in a cell before sunset. She brought about a different appreciation of life for him again and made him love life more than I thought he was capable of. If you truly love someone, like I loved Nelson Mandela, you want what is best for him and you want him to be happy. And when he was with her and he lived again, despite the confines of their schedules and the pressure of their work, he was truly happy. Slowly I came to the realization that she was not there to assert her space; she was there to make him happy and we had an even better boss because of her. There was no single bigger gift to Nelson Mandela's life than what Graça Machel brought about with her presence.

This is in stark contrast to the presence of Winnie Mandela in my life – I didn't meet her until much later and never saw her during Madiba's Presidency. She seemed to have little presence in the President's life after they separated. He never spoke about her and I didn't ask. No one tells you but you assume it's not something you ever raise. As time passed he spoke more openly in confidence about these events in his life. However, sometimes he seemed sad and I often wondered about the silent pain he was going through.

When I came to the President's house I often found him sitting alone at the breakfast or dinner table. He usually had lunch at his official residences whether in Cape Town or Pretoria. One couldn't help but feel the loneliness whenever you entered his Houghton home while he was having a meal by himself. It was only when Mrs Machel became part of his life that this changed. It was as if light entered the sombre household, the curtains were opened and the entire house was filled with life.

When one sat down with him, he started telling his stories. Stories about prison and the years that he grew up in the Transkei. Meals were times for him to 'reflect' and relax. I loved listening to his story-telling as I've always loved my own imagination and it was easy for me to picture what he was telling me and virtually be transported to the scene he was describing. He often told me about Justice, the boy he grew up with and who was his best friend. Justice was more than a friend, he was the 'brother' Madiba never had. They ran away together when they both suddenly found out they were being set up for arranged marriages by the Regent who brought Madiba up, like people usually do in the countryside and in accordance to their tradition at the time. Madiba and Justice fled the Transkei to Johannesburg where his life was shaped into politics. He spoke fondly

of Justice but sadly Justice passed away while Madiba was still imprisoned. As a result of too much drinking, Madiba said.

I often thought about Justice. If there is one person I wished to be alive to be part of our lives it was Justice. I wanted him to know what happened to his friend and I wanted him to know what one could become despite their humble beginnings. I wanted to turn back time and warn him to stop drinking, to tell him that he would be reunited with his friend some day, and I wanted him to witness and share in the life of his best friend. I knew he would have been invited to the Inauguration if he was alive at the time and I imagined his joy and excitement over his best friend taking the oath. I think, however, once Madiba was imprisoned Justice perhaps gave up hope of ever breaking the cycle of poverty in his family and resorted to drinking.

His wistful remembrances of his boyhood in Qunu and his adolescence in Mqekezweni with Justice seemed to take up a lot of Madiba's quiet time. It was like he travelled there – to those old, simple days – to get peace, to get a sense of himself. Over and over again, I would find him remembering his childhood. Those experiences seemed not only to shape him as a man and define his values, I think his memories of his childhood became an escape – it was also a survival mechanism he probably used in prison. Those experiences – of herding cattle, of stick fighting, of roaming the hills of the Eastern Cape, listening to village elders, of stealing out of beehives and finding gooseberries – became like movies in his head that he could access when the realities of prison or being President just got too much. He replayed those images, those pastoral scenes, in his head and retold the stories so often that many of us who heard his whispered remembrances can recite them word for word. But those are not my stories, they are his.

When Madiba left prison, everyone had grown up and grown away. It seemed it was difficult for him to open up emotionally. Prison had taught him how to hide his feelings. I saw him try with his grandchildren but he was a reserved disciplinarian, which often did not go down well with the young ones. He yearned for his children while imprisoned and he wanted to have a part of such pleasures. But it wasn't easy.

I would often go to the President's house in Johannesburg as he hardly ever slept at the official residence in Pretoria, Mahlamba Ndlopfu. Four of his grandchildren were living with him at the time. They were the four sons of Makgatho, the President's only living son

at the time from his marriage to his first wife, Evelyn. Mandla, the eldest grandchild, was in the last years of high school; Ndaba, the second born, was a teenager and then the two younger boys, Mbuso and Andile, were still small toddlers. They were adorable and loving. Their father lived somewhere in Soweto but the President enjoyed having them around. They were effectively raised by the housekeeper, Xoliswa – who they referred to as Mama – and then Rochelle, the President's niece, until she left. At the time they provided liveliness to the house in Houghton and some sense of family.

* * *

In the early years I often found myself alone, other staff being in Pretoria, in the President's office in Cape Town. I was handling the President's personal office switchboard when I was called by reception one day at the entrance of the building. The police on duty at the entrance informed me that I had visitors who wanted access to the President's office. This warranted me to get up and go to reception myself as no one was allowed access to the President's office. Upon arriving I was introduced to someone from NI (National Intelligence, even though I didn't make the connection immediately). I found it strange that two men randomly showed up at reception and told me that they needed to 'sweep' the President's office. I had no idea what they were referring to and told them, completely innocently, that we had cleaners in the office who swept the office daily, thank you very much.

I remained speechless in reception until the police working at the entrance told me that they were National Intelligence officers and that they used the term 'sweep' to mean looking for listening devices that could have been planted in the office by other parties. I felt extremely embarrassed and allowed them access. For years to come security would tease me over this. I took it in my stride. It was all part of this new world opening up to me, totally foreign to my past.

That summer I was also asked to accompany the President on a two-day rest to Bali, followed by a state visit to Indonesia and Thailand on which Mrs Machel accompanied us. It was now generally accepted that even though I was still the senior ministerial typist, I would accompany the Presidential party on visits abroad and perform the duties of secretary. In those years I was too scared to enjoy anything and I didn't enjoy the waters of the swimming pool or the

sea. I was determined to stay in my room for whenever the President may call on me. And he did. He got used to the fact that I was always there and I started sleeping when he did, eating when he did and following his routine to ensure that I was always available in my room whenever he called.

Part of our duties included making sure that he got served food at the right time, his clothes were unpacked and packed whenever Mrs Machel was not around, and things around him were the way he preferred them to be. In his programme we also had to find time for him to have massages every second day, and press clippings had to be sent from South Africa every day in the absence of newspapers. I made sure those arrived before breakfast and took every effort to ensure that things were exactly the way he wanted them. No matter which time zone we were in, the poor staff at the office had to work shifts to prepare news clippings and send them in time. Even after computers and the internet dominated our lives, he insisted that the clippings be exactly that – newspapers cut out, photocopied and faxed to us no matter where we were. I tried my best to introduce alternatives, also to lighten the burden on the staff back in South Africa, but he wouldn't have anything but the originals as they appeared in the particular font in the newspapers.

The President was always very uncomfortable if left alone with massage therapists. Either security or I had to be in the room with him at all times when these therapists were around. It was extremely frustrating to me as I am not a person that can sit still for an hour. It was way before we had BlackBerries or smart phones and there was literally nothing to do to pass the time. On several occasions I tried to get security to take my place but he would then usually call me back when he noticed I wasn't there or called upon me and I didn't answer. I did it probably more than a hundred times and he called me back more than a hundred times over the years, until I explained to him one day that I really cannot sit still for that long and he accepted the fact that one of his security people would be with him, which also made a little more sense practically. An hour to me meant falling behind on work or things to be arranged. In any event I thought, how was I ever going to be of any use in an emergency? It was better for a bodyguard to be there from a security point of view. It also gave me at least an hour to do some other things, email the office, go through programmes or return phone calls.

The President had this enormous ability to break things down to

the simplest method of reason and argument. He always told us that Oliver Tambo, another liberation struggle hero and former President of the ANC, never wanted to have massages and he was convinced that if Oliver had done, he would still be alive. What he meant was that he thought that Uncle Oliver, who died of a stroke, would have dealt better with the stress and pressure if he had learned to relax by ensuring that he took care of his physical well-being through massage or physiotherapy. The President had a unique way of relating stories and he would use the exact same words and phrases whenever he repeated a story. They were precious. And the conviction with which he conveyed this started worrying me so much that I also later imagined that it was necessary for me to have massages when I became too stressed.

From Bali we went to Indonesia, to the capital Jakarta on a state visit. I didn't see much of Jakarta and all we experienced was heat and humidity, but while he was there the President had a special meeting. It was done secretly. He only agreed to pay a state visit to Indonesia if he would be offered the opportunity to meet with Xanama Gusmão. The Indonesians delayed, probably thinking that the President wouldn't insist, but he did. One night Gusmão, the leader of the resistance movement of East Timor, was snuck in via the emergency staircase of the Presidential guest house. Gusmão was considered the equivalent of the political prisoner Madiba represented while imprisoned. His hands were cuffed. I found the visit exciting and wondered how Madiba dealt with it. After all it was only seven years before that he had been that very same prisoner.

Gusmão looked well under the circumstances and was friendly. He was alone with the President and Prof. Gerwel and others for a while before he was taken back to prison. It was agreed that he would be allowed to visit South Africa a few weeks later where he would feel free to talk. President Suharto agreed and a few weeks later we received him in South Africa. It was less exciting as he now no longer had handcuffs or seemed like a prisoner in normal clothes. Years later he visited the retired Madiba in Johannesburg to thank him for the negotiations and only then was I reminded about events of that night. He was by then freed and the legitimate President of an independent East Timor. It is believed that Madiba's intervention put Suharto under pressure to release Gusmão.

Wherever there was conflict around the world, people would ask for the President's intervention to negotiate a peaceful settlement. He

often declined to intervene in the domestic affairs of other countries because he said we did not have enough knowledge about the intricacies of the problems they faced. Yet the political will to help where it was possible or where he thought we had a chance to succeed made him do otherwise.

From Indonesia we went to Bangkok. We stayed in a lavish hotel and I came to the realization that I was becoming an expert on hotels worldwide. However, even though I could recite their room service menus I didn't see much of any cities. My experiences were limited to the extent of the President's sightseeing experiences. We were not there on holiday but to work. The President only asked to do sightseeing on a few occasions but usually limited it to the main tourist attractions and if there was anything he had read about before that could be of interest to him. Generally there was no time for sightseeing as his schedule was packed with meetings and then time blocked off for much needed rest. He was seventy-nine years of age and he needed rest at any given opportunity.

Despite spending every waking hour helping to make the President's day faultless, I was unfortunately not a paragon of diplomacy. In Thailand, we were sitting at an official lunch hosted by Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai and by now advance protocol teams doing planning knew that the President liked to have eye contact with his secretaries at the table so that when he called for them or needed them, he could just look at us and we would know. Seats were therefore arranged accordingly. I could see his face but it luckily wasn't too close for him to witness what happened next.

I had a long-sleeved blouse on and the sleeves were wide. The first course was served and breadrolls were served on our side plates. I reached out for the butter on the table in front of me and I didn't realize that my sleeve caught the breadroll on my plate, and as I picked up the container of butter to bring it closer to my plate the breadroll touched my elbow, where it had now rolled down my sleeve. Not realizing what had happened I reacted with shock and thought something had crawled into my sleeve. I was already nervous from not knowing what I was eating and this didn't help. I quickly jerked my arm back to get whatever was crawling up my sleeve out, and the breadroll flew over the table to the middle, where it landed. Silence followed in my immediate surroundings. Luckily the Thai people are extremely friendly and hospitable. They laughed it off and the gentleman next to me said it meant good luck. My first thought was

that it seemed everything in this country meant good luck no matter how unfortunate it appeared to us foreigners. I took his best wishes and quietly reached for another breadroll, swallowing my own embarrassment with each piece of bread.

* * *

The President was travelling non-stop and working relentlessly. When he was at home, he would take time to address union organizations like the National Union of Mineworkers, the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa and the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union. He was always balancing, always ensuring that he was not seen to discriminate in any way and applying his fair mind to every situation possible. He was driven to lay the foundation for a prosperous future for South Africa but back in July 1996 he announced publicly that he would only serve as President for one term of five years. He honestly believed that younger people could achieve more than him, and by announcing that he would only serve one term he had hoped that other heads of state would follow suit and not be tempted to become hungry for power and serve for endless terms, becoming dictators.

At every public event he called upon the police on duty afterwards to greet them, or if there was a choir that performed he wanted to shake hands with each and every one of its members. He would also always spot children in a crowd and call upon them to come to the front so he could greet them. In the beginning I thought it was just something he occasionally felt up to, but then when I realized that he did so without fail at every event, I would start making plans for this to happen at all events once I got there. It was his way of acknowledging the small people.

However, he could become harsh with people who he didn't feel were loyal to him. He would give, give and give and then if there was the slightest indication that he felt someone was not behind him 120 per cent then he would abruptly cut ties. He inspired loyalty but then he expected you to be faithful. This happened with Mary Mxadana. The working relationship between Mary and the President was increasingly tense. Mary was friendly with the President's ex-wife, Winnie Madikizela Mandela, and that unsettled him. He asked for her to be transferred to a diplomatic position in the Department of Foreign Affairs. Mary left gracefully. Very sadly a few years later she passed

away after a hernia operation. I was really sad when I saw her in hospital and I will always be grateful for the role she played in my life.

* * *

The President would spend his Christmas holiday with his grandsons in Qunu, the village where he grew up. It is in the Province of the Eastern Cape of South Africa and about 30 km south-west of a town called Mthatha in what was formerly known as the Transkei. By then, his niece Rochelle, who had looked after him, had left the house to further her studies in America, and the President relied on me to take care of some issues Rochelle had done before. One of them was organizing a Christmas party on his farm in Qunu on Christmas Day for the children of the village. Well, that is what it was supposed to be.

He made a list of a few people to be called and asked them all for donations of sweets, toys and other simple Christmas treats. The first year I was involved it was 2,000 of everything. I took responsibility for orchestrating the collection of the goods and making sure that they arrived in Qunu a few days before Christmas. I realized we needed bags, so bags were bought, and I involved the children from the community, and even our security, to help pack parcels for the 2,000 children expected to come to the President's house on Christmas Day. I set up a proper production line in one of the facilities around his house and we packed parcels for days ahead of Christmas, sometimes losing encouragement when so overwhelmed by 2,000 of everything. One only knows what 2,000 constitutes when you've packed and handled 2,000 parcels. When the President told me that for many children from the region this was the only day they had a proper meal or received something for Christmas, I didn't believe him at first. But when Christmas arrived, truth was put to the President's words. Thousands of children descended on Qunu.

The majority of black people in South Africa lived and still live in severe poverty. It was going to take a very long time for economic transformation to be implemented and to affect the lives of rural communities in a beneficial way. Things have somewhat changed now but not nearly as fast as we had hoped for, and people in rural South Africa are angry and disappointed for not having benefited from democracy yet. And as the crowd descended on Qunu I realized that

the people in these communities had not tasted the fruits of our newly achieved freedom. When I asked where they came from the President said that some of them started walking the previous night to be in time. When I arrived on the farm from town on Christmas Day at around 7 a.m., which I thought was a reasonable time, children had already lined up along the fence of his farm all the way up the hill – about a kilometre. I couldn't believe what I saw. We prepared to hand out parcels and the children would then be taken to the yard at the back of the house where they were fed. The very friendly Mr Bread, a bakery in Qunu, would take care of preparing food for the elders and VIPs from the region, together with Madiba's eldest grandson, Mandla.

Soon the children started streaming through the gates. The President sat outside for most of the day, greeting children as they moved along and got handed their parcels before they went to eat. Shaking hands with each and every one of them, one by one, and conversing with them briefly. Being the disciplined, organized person that the President was, he appreciated my military precision for order in the way things were handled. Children filed past in single line and got handed a bag of surprises from the helpers, after which they were guided to the lunch area. I made sure we didn't overlook anyone and they all had the opportunity to shake hands with him for the time he was seated outside.

Since many of them had never been accustomed to the belief of Father Christmas because of the remote areas in which they lived, this was their fantasy and what their entire worlds revolved around – seeing President Mandela and receiving gifts from him. When a company donated frizbees for all the parcels you would soon see thousands of frizbees flying around and people dodging them everywhere. The next time there might be balls, and balls would be heading for targets such as your head. We assume all children know what a ball or a frizbee is, until you see how children in rural South Africa live and you understand that they do not recognize something we take for granted. One year someone wanted to donate plastic play guns and we had to decline as we didn't want to promote violence with our message of goodwill. The children were not entirely sure whether they were happier about the parcel or shaking hands with the President. It was precious to see. And then the evidence of the President's comments about their only meal. The proof was there. I saw children infected with diseases without names. Underfed, deformed, mistreated, neglected. I could finally relate to what he

described. Somehow when you see the innocence and gratitude in their eyes you manage to look past appearance.

Some of them had never seen white people before, and one child rubbed my arm to see whether the 'white' of my skin gives off in some way. I adored picking up the little ones, although the white of my skin sometimes scared them. It was so ironic – years earlier I had conformed to the racist approach that it was inappropriate to touch a black person because we inherently feared them. Some of the children were scared of me and the few other white bodyguards. We must have been aliens to them. On more than one occasion I had a child 'bound by my hip' for the entire day . . . probably encouraged by curiosity to see whether I returned to a different planet afterwards.

When you spend a day like Christmas in such a poverty-stricken area one is truly and honourably thankful for your own privileges, and an event like this brings a different meaning to Christmas. It was the first Christmas I celebrated without my parents, without presents and the focus on 'what I'm receiving for Christmas'; the focus changed to what can I give and do and that in itself brings so much more fulfilment and meaning to Christmas. We had lunch with Madiba following the children's party and some of his grandchildren and elders from the area visited.

The following year we realized that preparing for 2,000 children was not going to be sufficient. We increased to asking for donations for 5,000. This time around the President left everything to me. I consulted him about decisions and asked advice on certain matters but by now people knew about his initiative and it wasn't difficult to find sponsorship. Again in December we prepared a few days before Christmas but this time for 5,000. We still didn't have enough gifts and food. The following year we increased to 10,000 until we ended with 20,000. Again, packing 20,000 parcels is no joke. Yet the children of the area and some of the grandchildren participated in the preparations and somehow we managed. The last year of our private party we ended up packing for two weeks around the clock prior to Christmas. And all I repeated to encourage people helping was 'remember, for some children this is the only opportunity during the year to get a decent meal and a gift bag . . . this is the only gift they get for Christmas', reciting the President's exact words. Not that the children in the village were used to much more but it made the bodyguards participate in my task at hand.

In the last year, Oprah Winfrey asked to participate following our

visit to Chicago and the President telling her what we did in Qunu over Christmas. I think they prepared for 25,000 children in Qunu and she also distributed around another 25,000 to other rural schools across South Africa. But she did it properly. Children received clothes and school stationery in addition to sweets and a very nutritious meal. We underestimated the size of the crowd and how widely it was advertised that both Oprah and the President would be there and we ended up avoiding a stampede. Some mothers travelled with children from as far as the Free State, hundreds of kilometres. Buses of children were offloaded and security was insufficient. It was then decided that, after closely escaping tragedy, the Christmas party would be taken over by the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund and decentralized to regions.

At the time he initiated the annual Christmas parties in Qunu, the President then also initiated visits, close to the end of the year, to pre-primary schools in both Johannesburg and Cape Town. He loved interacting with children. Again the first year he instructed his niece to handle matters, and when she left for the USA I inherited the job. The President was teaching me valuable lessons on how to ask for donations and support for people in desperate need of resources when you yourself cannot afford to buy them something. In return for sponsors donating sweets and goods for him to hand out during his visit, they would get to spend an entire day with him while he was handing these out, as well as exposure on television and in newspapers. The plan was simple but worked like a bomb. We would then invite a media contingent to follow us on the day when we visited the crèches, and the media representatives got to spend a day with their beloved President too, while giving the sponsors the exposure that the President promised. At the end of the day the media and sponsors were invited to a lunch at our offices or a nearby hotel where the President thanked them for their support. News spread and people were eager to help in the years to follow.

On a few occasions politicians tried to hijack or interfere with his arrangements, upon which he made it clear that the initiative should not be limited to any one political party but that the parents and teachers of these children should be respected for their political views too. I always had to make sure that the selection of schools was 100 per cent representative. If we visited five schools it had to be two black, one Indian, one brown and one white school. As schools got more integrated after transformation in South Africa it became quite a

challenge and we had to visit the schools in advance to make sure that we had the correct denomination of each race group covered. We also had to be careful not to visit a predominantly Xhosa school – Xhosa being the ethnic group to which the President belongs. He was extremely sensitive about matters of this nature and it became a blueprint in my mind that if we did something for one group, we had to do something for another. He never wanted to be seen to be prejudiced or accused of favouritism, and it was as if he was determined to remain the figurehead of nation-building, regardless of efforts from people to tag him to a specific group, race, religion, class, whatever.

I have no idea why I ended up carrying the responsibility of the Christmas parties or pre-primary school visits and why he didn't hand it to his Children's Fund that he had established even before I joined him. Although I benefited emotionally from taking on this task, being introduced to a new meaning of Christmas, I had more than enough work pressure and challenges to deal with. I was happy when it was decentralized to the Children's Fund.

* * *

At the same time the President initiated his schools and clinics building project. He managed to persuade business, both locally and internationally, to build schools and clinics in the most remote countryside in South Africa. More than a hundred schools were erected through this initiative and more than fifty clinics. President Mandela was never the greatest administrator but his intentions and strategy were faultless.

At first government didn't pay much attention to these new structures being erected. The process was simple. The President would speak to a particular chief, the person from the traditional leadership in a particular rural area in charge of his community. The chief would plead for a school. The President would read of excellent financial results of companies in newspapers and then task me to start looking for the CEO or managing director or owner of the company. He would then invite them to have breakfast or lunch with him. Who would say no to being invited by the President? Towards the end of the project business people teased among one another that if the President invited you for breakfast, it could be the most expensive breakfast of your life. Only on two occasions did people promise to build structures that they

never fulfilled. It was impossible for government to provide services at the pace at which the public expected them to, and the President did what he could to speed up the process by involving the private sector to support these efforts, education and health care being his priorities. He always said that education is the only weapon with which one can fight poverty.

First we would arrange for the business representatives to fly with us to these rural areas to be shown where the school or clinic had to be built and to be introduced to the community leaders who had to oversee the project. We spent hours and hours travelling to remote areas. Once the project was completed, we would return with the businessmen to the area and the President would personally open the school or clinic.

In the advanced stages of the project, and by the change of government in 1999, it was discovered that many of these structures were left abandoned. Government was not providing the teachers, equipment, nurses or facilities and infrastructure to support the initiative. While one can appreciate their challenges it was a pity that there was no co-ordination in time for them to be able to provide the backup to ensure the efficient running of these institutions. The President was also sometimes to blame as he too gave in to requests from traditional leaders too easily, without any proper investigation into whether a school or clinic was really planned in the right area. In later years the Nelson Mandela Institute for Education and Rural Development partnered with the University of Fort Hare in the Eastern Cape to support some of these schools the President initiated.

Sadly the education system in South Africa, and specifically in the rural areas, tends to fail its learners. To date, this is one of the biggest challenges South Africa faces, the education of our children. The teaching profession is one of the worst paid professions in South Africa and as a result it has stopped attracting people with a passion for the job. Teachers can simply no longer afford to support their own families and in rural areas the infrastructure fails in supporting teachers in terms of providing them with the right tools and textbooks. Because of the remoteness of the location of some of these schools they hardly receive support from the national education department and it is at the same time difficult for the department to exercise discipline.

On each visit where a rural school or clinic was built, the media was invited to accompany the President as well. The exposure for any

company associated with this project on prime-time news, with the President, was worth the money they had to fork out. Many of them still continue to support some of the schools and clinics they erected originally and shared in his passion about education for our youth.

* * *

In 1998 President Bill Clinton faced the biggest challenge of his political career. The scandal over the relationship with Monica Lewinsky threatened his political career and was making world headlines. In the middle of the fallout he was scheduled to be in South Africa on a state visit. When in trouble, one cannot ask for a better friend than Nelson Mandela. The President was never going to condone what had happened, but he had a way to put things in perspective of one's humanity. You would still feel guilty, but he made you feel safe and in a gentle way persuaded you to take responsibility without feeling humiliated. Observing this over time I realized how my thinking had changed and how I assessed things I would feel very opinionated about before. President Mandela was never scared to admit his own mistakes and then almost jump at the opportunity of apologizing and then to move on. He consistently told people whenever they wanted to sing his praises that 'a saint is a sinner who keeps on trying'.

That doesn't imply that he ever justified something that was without integrity or honesty but he inherently believed that people always had the best intentions and that they stumbled occasionally, as all human beings do. What was important to him, and became clear to me, was that those who faltered, sinned or stumbled didn't feel alienated because they made mistakes. He was honest about their mistakes but assured them in a way that he acknowledged their humaneness while making it clear that honesty to admit one's mistakes was far more important to the event in forgiving yourself and moving on. President Mandela welcomed President Clinton with open arms, admitted the personal difficulties he was facing with regard to the Lewinsky saga, but reassured President Clinton that he still respected him and had faith in his ability to lead.

On 27 March 1998 a banquet was hosted in honour of President Clinton's visit to South Africa. By now the secretaries were all taking equal turns in attending events and supporting the President. I was surprised to be asked to work during the state banquet held at

Vergelegen, a wine farm in the prestigious wine lands close to Cape Town. It was a rare historical event and everybody wanted to work that night. Vergelegen is a forty-five minute drive from Genadendal, the President's official residence, so to avoid traffic and save time security decided it would be better for us to take a helicopter to Vergelegen.

I was never good (and still am not) at dressing up. I am most comfortable in my favourite jeans, flip flops and a shirt or t-shirt. However, I realized for this banquet I had to really make an effort. This was, after all, the state event for what was considered the most powerful nation in the world. I had a black long dress made for the event, nothing extravagant, and decided on shoes with a bit of a heel, not too high though, as we are usually on our feet all night.

Our military helicopters were rough and soldier-like. I could always imagine us being on our way to combat whenever we were in the helicopter. The Oryx is a solid military machine, considered one of the best helicopters manufactured in the world, with space for sixteen passengers in full armour. By now I loved flying in our helicopters. I loved the sound of them and especially when the pilots manoeuvred it a bit; always being fond of a bit of adventure.

We landed at Vergelegen and the steel steps to disembark were put in place as soon as the rotorblades stopped. According to protocol, the President always enters a plane last and disembarks first. Then if Mrs Machel accompanied us or he had an official partner, that person would follow, and then whoever could manage to get to the door first. The security detail usually jumped out of the helicopter as it was low. The President disembarked and Mrs Machel followed. As the President started climbing down the stairs he started talking to me and asked me a question as he reached the ground. The question probably dealt with something about the programme or President Clinton's arrival time. He was about to turn round to make eye contact and get my response when I came flying down the stairs and landed on both my knees behind him. It turned out that my long dress got stuck over the railing of the steel steps and prevented me from stepping down further. Everyone around me started laughing, except the President and Mrs Machel. It must have been the funniest sight people ever saw. It's one thing falling, then another dressed in evening wear, but it surely is a sight when doing all of that out of a helicopter. The President was still trying to make eye contact with me on his level but found me on the ground behind him. He commanded 'Help her up,

help her up' and was very concerned about my well-being. 'Did you spoil your dress?' he asked and I did a quick check, but all seemed to be OK.

People had great difficulty composing themselves. As President Clinton was also expected to arrive by helicopter, the entire area was filled with secret service agents. They were hiding in bushes everywhere and it looked like a sudden wind blew through the estate as the people in bushes started laughing at my entrance. The President was the only one that seemed troubled by my tumbling down and the rest of the people all laughed and had great difficulty to get themselves to be serious again. I composed myself and we moved to the house where we were going to await President Clinton's arrival.

President Mandela was given a seat in the house adjacent to the marquee where the banquet was to be hosted, to await the arrival of President Clinton so they would enter the banquet simultaneously. I remained outside to try and gather information about his expected arrival time to enable me to give feedback to the President. Vergelegen is a private wine farm and the house beautifully decorated in Cape Dutch style. While waiting outside I met one of South Africa's best comedians, Pieter-Dirk Uys. He was getting ready for his performance at the banquet and I was distracted from earlier events. The President loved his satirical performances and he usually didn't spare anyone in his comic interpretations of South Africa's politicians. Upon stepping back into the house where the President was waiting I didn't see a brick placed in front of a door to keep it from being blown closed by the wind and tripped over it as I entered the building. This time I didn't fall but rather found myself much faster in front of the President than expected. He just said: 'Oh no darling, rather get a chair and come and sit down.' I was very embarrassed and obviously more nervous than ever when I handed the President his speech at the podium when he was expected to speak later that night. I prayed as I walked up the stairs to the podium that another disaster wouldn't strike. It didn't and the rest of the evening was uneventful.

* * *

I was now often looked to by both the President and Mrs Machel. We were having great difficulties marrying their diaries. We had to find time for them to be together but it was not easy. Mrs Machel continued her work in Mozambique and across the world, mainly

advocating for children's rights, and she was travelling a lot. I was often in trouble for not finding time for her and the President to spend together, but it was a nearly impossible task. They both worked at a pace, almost racing against time. The President would want a hundred things done in a week and when we managed to fit in everything, Mrs Machel's schedule was packed. Often the President would agree to arrangements and then the day before the entire diary would change, not because of Mrs Machel but he would also have pressing priorities or simply change his mind about something. We were running out of excuses why we had to cancel arrangements at short notice and we always feared that people might suspect health problems being the cause.

In those days, if the President had as much as a common cold South Africa's currency, the rand, would plummet at the news of any rumours about the President's health – the world fearing that South Africans would be dumped in chaos and burn the country to the ground. The President was the symbol of stability to all South Africans, black and white, and the world knew it. Using his health or 'not feeling well' as an excuse was therefore never even contemplated unless it was the absolute truth. He was almost becoming a super-being in the public's eyes. If he wanted to take a rest, public speculation about his health would start.

Early in 1998 the President was scheduled to do a fundraiser for the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund. The Children's Fund was established by him in 1995 to help children, especially orphans affected by the AIDS crisis. In addition to donating his prize money from the Nobel Peace Prize to establish the fund, he also annually donated a third of his salary towards the fund and set out on a fundraising drive for it when time allowed. On this particular occasion he was scheduled to host some top international celebrities and models and they would then embark on a trip to launch the newly refurbished Blue Train – South Africa's luxury passenger train – after which he would do a trip on the QE2. People could pay thousands of dollars to join him and Mrs Machel, proceeds that would obviously benefit the Children's Fund and so the journey was sold out.

It was also during these events when the much-disputed diamonds were given to Naomi Campbell by then President Charles Taylor of Liberia. Naomi was a supporter of the Children's Fund right from its inception and was one of the first international donors to the fund.

During the trial of Charles Taylor at the International Criminal

Court that recalled events of the fundraiser, I was interested in the order of events. No one asked any of the South African security officials at the time who the bodyguards were that knocked on Naomi's door in the Presidential guest house and handed her the 'bag of stones'. If they were South African bodyguards, they would have opened the bag before handing it to her. No one, not even a President, got to deliver a gift on official premises without the gift being opened and searched. If anyone asked security they could well have verified how many stones were inside and it would be on record whoever entered the house that night. A South African police officer is required to keep what they refer to as a pocket book. In there they write every day whatever they do and they account for every minute, precisely, for in the event of court procedures they could refer back to the pocket books. I doubt the South African police would have allowed two Liberian bodyguards unaccompanied into the Presidential guest house, and the answers are therefore somewhere on record in South Africa. We knew nothing of the gift, but Naomi said that she handed the bag of diamonds to the CEO of the Children's Fund, although he was later found not guilty of possessing uncut diamonds.

We embarked on the QE2. It was a lovely experience although the vessel was clearly equipped for elderly people. It was grand and old-school. People dressed up to go and have dinner every night but to me it looked like they were going to church. There were no parties for young people but rather ballroom dancing. It was sweet though to see elderly people dancing and still so in love. The President and Mrs Machel didn't go dancing though, but enjoyed being on the QE2. They attended only an introduction and a dinner on the ship and the rest of the time they finally had some privacy and quality time together away from the pressures on the 'mainland'.

After the QE2 trip I fell ill, for the second time in four years. I just couldn't maintain the pace. The President was driven by many factors, one being that his retirement from public office was less than a year away and he wanted to capitalize on being in a position to fast-track the changes he had hoped for, for his Presidency. The doctors said it was a repeat of a myocarditis infection I had sustained after our state visit to Japan in 1995 and that I was just exhausted. I was put on sick leave at home for four weeks and after about a week I got a call from the bodyguards to tell me that the President wanted to visit me at my little house in the government village, Acasia Park. I didn't think it was appropriate for a President to come to my little simple one-

bedroom house, and I called him to try and persuade him that I was fine and would report back for work soon and that it wasn't necessary to visit me. He insisted and soon arrived with the most beautiful basket of flowers I have ever received.

While visiting and encouraging me to regain strength he also very innocently said, 'You know only weak people get sick.' I thought he was going to show a bit more sympathy. He had believed all his life that you are very much in control of your own body, and in the process of healing your mind had to be stronger than the medicines applied. You also had to have the determination to get better.

No matter how difficult things became, how much pressure we were under or how tired I was, seeing his face and his smile lighting up the room was a highlight every day of my life. I later couldn't help but smile whenever I saw him. When you work closely with someone you inevitably start reading the other person's emotions and moods. Yet still in the most difficult times the smile was never far from my face, sometimes just reserved to my heart.

So I continued to work at a relentless pace, though the stress and fatigue were overwhelming at times. Once Madiba read me an article that appeared in a newspaper about a study on people who carried more weight around the hips and buttocks and that it was found that they deal with stress better. The first time he read it I took the point and said: 'You see Khulu, that's why I still deal with all the stress, because my hips and my bum are big.' He laughed out loud and then read the article to me for a second time. I didn't find it funny. He was teasing but I was able to stop him.

He was always very attentive to people's weight and health. He would often ask a lady whether she was pregnant even if she had just picked up a few kilograms around the waist. Sometimes he would request a private discussion with a visitor and then lecture them on their weight. I have lost count of the number of times he would point out someone's big tummy and then tell them, 'You have to reduce.' Some people find it offensive to have their weight discussed but it is extremely embarrassing when Nelson Mandela tells you 'you have to reduce', implying you have to reduce your food intake or reduce your weight. We tried to avoid these discussions at all costs and whenever he said he wanted to have a 'private discussion' with people we would try and tell him that he shouldn't do it and it was not appropriate. He would laugh and find it very funny that we would try to spare people from having to go through that with him. And then sometimes people

insisted that they have their private discussion with him because they thought he was going to reveal confidential secrets and they would insist on having the private time with him, only to leave a few minutes later feeling not so fulfilled.

On one occasion I was waiting for his arrival at a public event; when he disembarked from the car he asked whether I had been there for long waiting for him. I said, ‘Yes indeed.’ And his response out loud was: ‘I can see because you look hungry.’ I wasn’t. Always concerned about my security and always concerned about whether I had eaten or not.

One time I was on a diet and I declined to eat the food that was offered at the table prepared for him but rather stuck to my salad, and he questioned me and said I wasn’t eating enough. I spoke to him openly and said that I was trying to lose weight. He then said that my weight didn’t matter because I moved quickly. What he meant was that even though I was overweight it didn’t affect the pace at which I walked or moved. He had such a funny way with food and body weight. When you didn’t eat he encouraged you to eat more, but when you took a second serving he would watch your plate with disapproval. I’ve always been sensitive about my weight but somehow not with him. When I complained about my weight he just said, sweetly, ‘But you are dignified.’

That June the President had lunch at Mahlamba Ndlopfu withWolfie Kodesh. The President told me that he had stayed with Mr Kodesh before he was incarcerated and I was very impressed when I learned that Mr Kodesh had actually hidden Madiba for a while in his apartment in Johannesburg in 1961. The President used to exercise early in the morning and he would jog on the spot in Mr Kodesh’s apartment for ten or twenty minutes a day. Despite the warm friendship that I witnessed between the two when they were reunited, I couldn’t help but imagine the annoyance of having a person jogging on the spot in your flat at 5 in the morning. Altogether their tolerance of one another, these liberation fighters, distinguished them to be a special breed. I admired their patience and tenacity.

I had once seen the seriousness with which the President exercised early in the morning in a hotel room. I had to control myself not to yell, ‘Khulu, you are going to injure yourself’ as he did his exercises. He was tall and trim but you underestimated his strength unless you saw him exercising. He resembled a boxer training and did every movement with conviction and determination. Whenever one asked

him what exercise he was doing, he would freely offer advice, and on more than one occasion while we travelled abroad I had to find a medicine ball for him to roll on. He said I should try it as it makes your stomach flat. At times, his exercise routine would be frenzied. So much so that Rory Steyn, his bodyguard, and I would find it hysterically funny. We would have to hide our giggles while Madiba exercised manically in some luxury hotel somewhere. I may not have been to all the touristy things in cities across the world but I can advise anyone on the hotels with the best room service menus, and where to find a medicine ball.

* * *

By now Virginia Engel was the head secretary of our office, after Mary had left. The President still knew my cellphone number by heart and simply kept on calling me for each and every thing, which sometimes put me in great difficulty having to report all his calls to Virginia. He would call me at night and tell me what medicine he wanted to be delivered the following day, or sometimes he would call me to remind him of something the following day. It is never a nice feeling to feel undermined by anyone and although I was really committed to my job, and adored the President, I am sure it was difficult for anyone not to feel undermined by these events.

During those years I tried to keep away from him as much as possible. I believed that the closer you get to the fire, the easier it is to get burned. I didn't want to impose myself upon him and tried to create a healthy distance and to avoid a situation where he ever felt cramped by my presence. In later years it became more difficult as he would become uncertain whenever I wasn't close in a professional situation. He knew I knew exactly what he wanted and how he wanted things to pan out around him so that he could comfortably deal with them. He wanted to know exactly what to expect from each moment or meeting and he trusted completely that I would ensure that order prevailed around him and that his needs would be my most important focus. Because they were. But officially at this point, I was simply one of the President's assistant private secretaries.

Another of my colleagues was Morris Chabalala. Morris was one of the sweetest people I ever met. He was softly spoken and had a very kind and humble demeanor. In a certain way the President was very old-school, not easily accepting the fact that a man could be his

secretary too. It was not that Morris did anything wrong, but the President just felt different about women in particular positions. The President never discriminated but would simply move focus to the women. It was the same situation with pilots. As soon as female pilots were trained in the airforce they started flying his plane or helicopter, and even though he never expressed reservations he was a bit more alert knowing there was a woman behind the wheel. We would always tease him about being discriminatory but he admitted that it was just something one had to get used to. He was very conscious of these stereotypes and he never showed his reservation publicly, but if you knew him you could sense his uneasiness. As much as he was for equality he admitted that he had to work harder at changing his own perceptions first.

Once Morris had to deal with a particular diplomatic incident. It involved the Spanish and Portuguese embassies. Morris was supposed to hand-deliver a letter to the Spanish Embassy that contained information that South Africa would in future recognize the Western Sahara as an independent country. Unfortunately he mistakenly and totally unintentionally delivered the letter to the Portuguese Embassy and not the Spanish. The Ambassador didn't report the incorrect delivery but opened and sat on the note for days before the President discovered that the letter he had sent to the Spanish Embassy had never been received. Morris figured it out himself that he had delivered it to the wrong embassy and called Professor Gerwel, who reported it to the President. The Spanish were livid.

The mistake caused a diplomatic incident and the President expelled the Portuguese Ambassador instantaneously from South Africa, for holding on to the note and not reporting its delivery. It was unethical to sit on information of national importance without alerting the government and could have potentially resulted in a very serious international diplomatic crisis. The President then felt he had to take action within his office as well, to demonstrate both the seriousness and fairness in dealing with the issue, and Morris got transferred, ironically as it may seem, to the Foreign Affairs Department. I pleaded with Prof. Gerwel and the President to give Morris another chance but the President was adamant that he had to take action, and once the President decided something not even something the scale of a military invasion could change his mind. I checked on Morris on a few occasions and he seemed to be happy in his new job, despite the turmoil and hurt his departure caused.

This incident, no matter how upsetting we found it, was a very clear indication of how President Mandela performed as a diplomat. Even though there may be nothing diplomatic about it. In a matter of days, the public had forgotten about the incident. He was swift with a response, both publicly and in private, took decisive action and the matter was resolved. Recently in South Africa, by way of contrast, it was found that friends of our current President, Jacob Zuma, were allowed to land at the military airforce base in Pretoria without proper authorization. The family that landed there had planned a lavish family wedding at the Sun City resort outside Pretoria. Despite the availability of commercial international and private airports in the region they landed at the military base and were escorted to the wedding venue in official police vehicles. Politically very little was done about this case.

* * *

As the year progressed, so did the President's travels. He was working hard to show the world that South Africa was a healthy country. So we travelled to Burkina Faso. It was an African Union meeting attended by all heads of state. In the first few years it was interesting to watch and be part of these large gatherings of heads of state around the world but it becomes your worst nightmare because of all the time wasted waiting around while protocol is being observed.

Accommodation was newly built in Burkino Faso, but apart from providing for food for the heads of state we were very much left to our own devices to find something to eat even though we were housed in these newly built guest houses. It was usually chaos at meetings of this sort and everything took hours. Other heads of state all argued for private audiences with President Mandela. Sometimes he agreed and sometimes he wanted to avoid too many individual meetings. Presidents were expected to arrive at the plenary in alphabetical order, either by name or the name of their country, as seniority was always a point of dispute – some heads of state had been in power for ever, originally by election but then by means of dictatorship. For some reason my father gave me a huge consignment of biltong (beef jerky) to take along on the trip and that became our staple food, together with fresh bread that we went to buy along the road from an informal stall. A former French colony, the French influence remained in Burkino Faso and we bought hot baguettes off the street stall, filled

them with biltong and for two and a half days the security guards and I lived off that shipment of dried meat.

In comparison to other delegations, ours was always the smallest. It usually consisted of a secretary, a doctor, two close protection bodyguards and then between three and five bodyguards who arrived in advance, plus at most two people from Protocol: one from the Presidency and one from Foreign Affairs. Ministers got added when they were required for certain bilateral talks but we never exceeded fifteen to twenty people in our entire delegation on our biggest visits, and that was only by exception and to countries with which South Africa had very close trade relations. Other heads of state travelled with delegations of twenty plus people and the Americans were the biggest with delegations of over two hundred, but they also had the money for it. Our President showed through his actions that we had other priorities and wastage was not going to be tolerated. While one appreciated that it also mounted the pressure on us as individuals to multitask.

Because of the President's advanced age – he was seventy-nine by now – he also liked continuity and he didn't like too many unfamiliar faces around him. Whenever there was a new member of staff on the delegation he would ask behind closed doors: 'Who is that person? What does he/she do?' And you would know that he spent time thinking about costs and productivity too. He often asked about costs involved, whether we were travelling locally or abroad. 'How much does the hotel cost where you are staying? Who is paying for it?' Regardless of your answer one knew that he was concerned about expenditure.

Following the visit to Burkino Faso we went to the United Kingdom and stayed at a house in the countryside belonging to the Roode family. They had a very large food company in South Africa. It was my first time in the English countryside and I loved it. After a few days' official visit in London, we went to Wales.

We paid a courtesy call on the Queen in Buckingham Palace and I was struck by the warm friendship forged between the President and the Queen. 'Oh Elizabeth' he would say when he greeted her and she would respond 'Hello Nelson'. Being a dog lover myself, I was intrigued to find the corgis' food bowls at the side entrance we used to Buckingham Palace.

After Wales we went to Italy for a state visit. We also paid a state visit to the Vatican. The President had a private conversation with the

Pope, after which they called our delegation inside. The President always insisted on introducing his entire delegation to the head of state and it was the same with the Pope. We each got introduced and the Pope, already frail at the time, shook hands, blessed us and gave us a rosary. I had no idea what a rosary was and thought it was some sort of Catholic necklace. I called my mother that night and told her I thought the Pope could see the sins in my eyes when he looked at me. Although some of my colleagues felt the same experience my mother laughed it off.

While at an official state lunch in Italy, one of the ministers choked on a prawn. He started by coughing and then suddenly silence descended on the table as he dropped off his chair. Luckily for President Mandela his doctor was at the official ceremony. Because we travelled with such a small delegation he always insisted that all his staff be included. Our doctor was able to literally save the minister's life at the table.

Later he also insisted on inviting the Presidential plane's aircrew to banquets even if it meant he had to request the head of state/ government himself to allow them to attend. He never treated any of his staff as just the hired help.

It was also on this trip that I was introduced to Yusuf Surtee, whose father used to be the President's tailor before he went to jail. Their family business continued supplying the President with suits and his famous patterned shirts. Yusuf brought a famous Italian gentleman, Stefano Ricci, representing the famous Brioni brand, to greet the President. As much as I resembled the typical boere-meisie Stefano was the typical Italian: jovial, lively and generous. He would always send the President the most beautiful clothing and one could always feel the love and care that went into the selection of clothes. Whenever Stefano sent clothes via Yusuf, Yusuf's shops would adjust whatever needed to be changed if needs be. Both Yusuf and Stefano had exceptionally good taste.

* * *

The President's eightieth birthday approached. A massive party was being planned by the ANC, the Mandela family together with Suzanne Weil, a business partner of the Mandela daughters, for the night of the President's actual birthday, 18 July. The President's entire personal staff were invited to the glamorous event at Gallagher estate in

Johannesburg, together with the cream of the crop of the South African social scene as well as people like Naomi Campbell, Michael Jackson, Quincy Jones and Stevie Wonder, to name but a few.

Earlier in the week speculation started doing the rounds that the President and Mrs Machel were going to get married on the 18th. I thought about it and decided that it was not true. Nothing out of the ordinary happened in our environment for me to believe that there was any truth to the speculation. Parks Mankahlana, the spokesperson for the President, was repeatedly asked: 'Are they getting married?' And Parks would at first say he wasn't sure, then he vaguely denied it, and finally he said that there was definitely no marriage. I called Josina (Mrs Machel's daughter) earlier in the week to ask if she knew anything. She didn't and we just laughed it off. Josina stayed with the President at his official residence in Cape Town during his Presidency while she was studying at university there. We therefore spent a lot of time together and became close friends. I said to her: 'Zina, if you are lying to me you know I am going to have to kill you.' Jokingly. We were excited about the birthday but we really didn't know. On Saturday 18 July I woke up to newspaper headlines that read: THEY ARE GETTING MARRIED. I just smiled. I was, among a few others, asked to go and work at the Houghton residence later that day. I thought they were probably expecting family for the birthday celebrations and therefore needed extra hands.

The President and I were used to speaking on the phone. He would give me tasks or I would call him with messages or questions. We were on the phone all the time, much to the irritation of many people. He got to know my voice and could easily hear me, whereas with others he had difficulty hearing them clearly over the phone. So on his eightieth birthday I decided to call him in the morning to wish him happiness for his birthday. I would never call or disturb him if I didn't have a very good reason to discuss business, but on this day I thought that it was such a special birthday that I had to call, despite knowing that I would see him later in the afternoon at his residence.

The President and Mrs Machel spent the Friday night at Mahlamba Ndlopfu, the President's official residence in Pretoria, something which didn't often happen as they preferred to stay in Johannesburg. The household staff transferred me to him and I said: 'Good morning Khulu' and started singing 'Happy Birthday' to him. After the last note I said: 'I hope this day, today, is the most beautiful day of your entire life.' I could hear his amusement and he knew that I was fishing for

information. He just said: 'Thank you darling, it definitely will be,' and then I knew, they were getting married. I felt like a jack in the box. I couldn't contain my excitement but I didn't want to say a word to anyone. I spent the entire day trying to figure out where/when/how. I then recalled the President asking me to call on a jeweller to see him at Mahlamba Ndlopfu a few weeks before; when the jeweller arrived they went outside and sat under a tree for their discussion. I thought it was someone the President knew from before and didn't pay attention. I felt that they were surely going to get married at the official banquet since they would have all their friends and family there but I was too scared to speculate.

They had a lunch at the Presidential guest house where the family was gathered. Staff were not invited. We proceeded to the Houghton house and arriving there it was clear that the media was not going to let go of the story. There were media everywhere, some trying to jump the walls and some climbing into trees from the adjacent plots. The security people had their hands full. We went inside and things were somewhat sombre and quiet. We stayed in the back and started putting out cups and whatever was needed for a tea later on. Soon the President and Mrs Machel arrived, followed by a few other guests. Again I didn't want to intrude and stayed as far away from them as possible. Then, like a veldt fire, news spread through the house: 'There is a wedding here in a few minutes.'

Things were simple and beautiful. Only a few people attended and really people closest to them: Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Thabo and Zanele Mbeki, Prince Bandar bin Sultan of Saudi Arabia, Yusuf Surtee, George Bizos, Ahmed Kathrada and the Sisulus, to name a few. And in true Madiba style there was complete representation of all the religious denominations in South Africa. Although they were married by the Methodist Bishop Mvume Dandala, all other religions had some role to play. It was very respectful and stylish. We saw Mrs Machel coming down the stairs by herself, gracefully, almost like her name says: Graça. Most of us couldn't control our emotions, and peeking from an adjacent room we couldn't help but wipe our tears. It was so beautiful and the President deserved to be happy at last.

That evening was every bit of the celebration it should have been. When Madiba finally took to the stage to say a few words on his birthday, his first words were to roaring applause when he said: 'My wife and I . . .' The country was celebrating with and for them.

It was a great evening and wonderful celebrations. I continuously

had to check myself as if to pinch myself. Was all this real? I had never dreamt that I would ever be at the eightieth birthday and wedding celebrations of Nelson Mandela. The short journey with him at the time had already changed me so much. Luckily we were too busy and under too much pressure for me to ever sit and become complacent or conceited about where I found myself at any given point.

* * *

On 10–12 September 1998, a SADC (Southern African Development Community) meeting was held in Mauritius. Member states included countries from Southern Africa and the meeting was chaired by South Africa at this particular time (heads of state assumed the chairmanship on a rotating basis). When the President and Mrs Machel arrived in Mauritius a few days before the meeting, there was already word that Lesotho, a tiny kingdom surrounded by South Africa, was on the brink of a coup. We were regularly in contact with Prime Minister Mosisili and King Letsie III of Lesotho and even though I didn't understand why, I knew that they were facing difficulties. Both the President and Deputy President Mbeki were out of the country at the time and Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi was Acting President of South Africa.

After President Mandela's inauguration, the National Party had joined the newly elected ANC government and that tenure of co-operative rule was known as the Government of National Unity. But by this time the Government of National Unity had been dissolved following the National Party's departure from the government. The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) was therefore the biggest opposition party in Parliament and appointing the leader of the IFP, Minister Buthelezi, as Acting President while both the President and his Deputy were abroad was a gesture of trust on the ANC's side.

I remember the President being bitterly tired and upset with events back home in which around 134 people were reportedly killed as a result of South Africa's invasion of Lesotho, in what is referred to today as the biggest mistake during Mr Mandela's Presidency. The President was literally on the phone throughout the night consulting with Minister Buthelezi and the Lesotho government.

It was no fun being in Mauritius for the first time. Instead of swimming in the beautiful waters of the Indian Ocean we attended to official engagements from banquets and meetings to a visit to the

Botanical Gardens. I wanted to swim rather than stare at a rare flower that only bloomed once every seventy-five years. We were also tired and disturbed by events back at home.

The following day the SADC meeting convened. The meeting was scheduled to start at 10 a.m. but President Mugabe from Zimbabwe entered the room more than an hour late. President Mandela didn't like chairing meetings and would usually open a meeting and then hand over to someone else to ensure the rules were observed. No one ever questioned this peculiar arrangement, and he would only occasionally comment on proceedings or nod to add his approval to process. While President Mugabe entered another head of state was busy addressing the meeting. President Mandela interrupted him and asked him to stop his address. This was unusual for him and the atmosphere grew tense as silence descended in the big hall; it was one of the few occasions that President Mandela interrupted someone while he was speaking.

President Mandela waited for President Mugabe to be seated and then launched into an off-the-cuff speech of about twenty minutes about being disrespectful and wasting other people's time, and that 'some heads of state' considered themselves more important and therefore thought it was acceptable to arrive late. He didn't mention President Mugabe's name once, but we all knew. He subsequently used words that never left me: 'Because you hold a particular position, doesn't mean that you are more important than anyone else. Your time is not more valuable than anybody else's time. If you are late you show that you have no respect for another person's time and therefore no respect for other people because you consider yourself to be more important than others.'

After President Mandela finished his speech President Mugabe allowed proceedings to continue for a while and then quietly left as unnoticed as he could. That was the last time I ever saw any kind of interaction between them and there was no contact again that I am aware of, except exchanging courtesies whenever they shared a stage at an all-Africa event.

President Mandela often related the story that before South Africa's democracy Zimbabwe was considered the star of the continent, but then when South Africa became a democracy they said the sun came out and the star disappeared. I was of the opinion that was one of the reasons why President Mugabe felt bitterness towards South Africa's efforts on the continent. More recently in an interview,

President Mugabe paid back by commenting on President Mandela being too much of a saint and pleasing white people at the expense of black people. President Mandela was no longer able to defend himself due to his age at that point, and I thought that Mugabe had waited for a very long time to seek revenge through public humiliation. His comment clearly lacked understanding of the South African situation and that had it not been for the focus on reconciliation at the time, our country would have gone up in flames, ending up much like the state in which Zimbabwe is today.

* * *

The President was scheduled to pay a state visit to Saudi Arabia and I was asked to accompany him. John Reinders, the Chief of Protocol in the Presidency and I, together with some security members, set off to Riyadh a few days in advance. I had received correspondence from the South African Embassy in Saudi and staff offered to 'rent' an abaya for me – the 'cloak' Muslim women wear to cover themselves. Since I didn't know what they were talking about, I agreed to that.

Upon arrival in Riyadh it was clear that this country, culture and religion was very different to any place I had imagined. I was handed my abaya at the airport and told to cover up immediately and every time I appeared in public. On our way to the Presidential guest house I was given a crash-course in the Islamic faith and Muslim culture. I was stunned to learn of all the rules that applied mainly to women only. I didn't take most of it seriously until I spoke to some of the officials later that night, who told me that they still had public executions in Riyadh for people committing 'religious crimes'. Being a bit of a deliberate rebel I decided to test the boundaries of this belief system on me as a 'Westerner'.

First we went out to a night market. As I jumped into the first available limo with an open door I heard a lot of people starting to argue around the car in Arabic. Apparently the argument was over who was allowed to travel with me and who not. As an unmarried woman, one is not allowed to travel in the car with any man who is not a relative. Especially and definitely not a married man. So I drove by myself.

The custom is that shops only open around 10 a.m. and at noon every day everything closes as they all go to the mosques to pray. At 1 p.m. they open again and around the hour some shops close for people

to go and pray again. You could find yourself in the front of a queue to pay for something in a store and be chased out of the shop when the sirens for prayer time start. It was therefore better to go to a night market where things would be open until late and praying wouldn't interrupt shopping as much as it did during the day.

In my briefing I was also told to watch out for the Mattawa, the religious military police. They were there to police people observing the Muslim culture. They walk around, dressed in uniforms similar to that of the ordinary police but they carry sticks with them dipped in red paint, I was told. If they catch someone not observing the culture they hit you with the stick on your ankles and the red paint sticks. If you are caught a second time, they arrest you. And who knows what then. I was once reprimanded in the market with a 'cover up, cover up' but quickly ran away before they could mark me with the paint and didn't see the paint myself. There were so many beautiful carpets to see and things to buy that it distracts you from focusing on the things around you, and I appreciated with what ease we lived back in South Africa. I nevertheless enjoyed the experience, so different from what was familiar to me. One was not allowed to visit Saudi as a tourist at the time and the visa process was thoroughly controlled and checked by the Saudi authorities. I therefore considered it a privilege and unique experience to be able to visit Saudi.

We had our first meeting scheduled with the chief of protocol the night before President Mandela's arrival in the country. It is definitely not one of the easiest countries to work in, particularly being a female. We waited for days to confirm a time with their chief of protocol to discuss a programme of some sort. The only response one would get is: 'wait'. So you wait. You can't go anywhere and you sit around for hours waiting for word from the officials.

The meeting was scheduled in the Presidential Palace where President Mandela was going to stay. At first the gentleman dressed in his traditional Arab garb seemed friendly. I avoided eye contact as I had been told. The Saudi chief of protocol started the meeting with the usual exchange of courtesies and how honoured they were to receive President Mandela, etc. We felt honoured. But I wanted him to stop and get to details of the programme. It was late and I was tired. By midnight, however, we were no closer to any details on the programme. By that time President Mandela's plane had already left South Africa.

John Reinders would put a question to the chief of protocol and he

would pick up the phone and converse in Arabic with someone on the other end. He would end the call and move to the next question. After two hours of this I had enough. John decided to go outside for a smoke break and I followed. We discussed what was happening inside and I told him that when we returned to the office I think I had to take over. Which I did. John was completely capable of negotiating by himself but we had run out of options in our approach, trying to get answers. I completely disregarded custom and looked the man straight in the eyes. I said: 'Sir, President Mandela is on his way here right now. In a plane. It is the first time in my life that I've heard of a state visit without a programme while the head of state is already on his way. The President expects us to know what will happen to him when he arrives but at this stage you are not helping us.'

The chief tried to avoid eye contact and picked up the phone again. He then excused himself and John and I started laughing. It was really ridiculous. When he returned thirty minutes later I lost it. It was well after 1 a.m. I slammed my fist on the table and said: 'Sir, if you do not give us any details now, right now, we will instruct the President's plane to turn around as we cannot expect our President to arrive in a foreign country without a programme for his visit.' I felt that he undermined our responsibilities to the President and he was simply not willing to share information. The man was clearly disgusted by me. Women just don't talk to men like that in that country. 'Madam,' he said to me, 'please calm down.' That is the second worst thing you can say to me. I said, 'I will not calm down unless you give us details now.'

He picked up the phone and clearly, without me having to understand a word, told the person on the other line to rush to the office. John calmly said to me in Afrikaans: 'I think they got the point.' Not long after two other gentlemen arrived and we moved to a bigger meeting room. A programme was laid out, and although times were not completely confirmed at least there was an indication of what was expected of the President.

The next morning I noticed that none of the staff in the palace spoke to me any longer. I assumed it was because of my behaviour the previous night. I didn't give a damn. About three hours prior to the President's arrival and an hour before we left to go to the airport, the entire palace came to standstill by the announcement of a prince arriving. Everyone rushed to the front door and formed a receiving line. We didn't know who to expect and I was told it could be one of

2,000 princes. Much to my surprise it was Prince Bandar, President Mandela's close friend, who was serving as Saudi Ambassador in the United States at the time. Clearly he was respected by everyone in the Palace.

When he entered he greeted by nodding his head and walked right up to me and kissed me. 'Oh hello Zelda.' I noticed from the corner of my eye how people's faces around me dropped. I was the only woman in their company, unmarried, and here a prince kisses me. 'How are you Zelda? Welcome,' he said and we exchanged some pleasantries. He walked me to a sitting room where he asked me about the President's arrival, programme etc. When he left, I was treated like a princess.

The Saudis are extremely hospitable people. They don't spare any trouble to ensure that one feels comfortable – that is, once you behave. They are generally friendly as long as you observe their culture and respect their beliefs. Madiba was accompanied by a few female ministers but we learned that even they were not allowed to attend the state banquet or meeting with the King. All the women subsequently went to a private dinner at a businessman's house. The state banquet that the President and his fellow men attended only started at midnight and they were only back at the Presidential guest house after 2 a.m. The next morning we were all tired, but despite our exhaustion the President had his breakfast at exactly 7 a.m. as usual. He was an eighty-year-old at that stage yet his enthusiasm and spirit was that of a young man.

When we departed the next day I was fed up with the rules and regulations and I wanted to be home in my own environment. As we checked in at the airport to board our commercial flights back home, the security men got stopped and their luggage was searched. They usually carried firearms with proper licences they obtained from the hosting government and security equipment like radios and their own metal detectors that they needed to perform their duties. Yet they got stopped, searched, and had to take every little piece of equipment apart. I made no secret of my disgust at Saudi bureaucracy. For goodness' sake, we were leaving the country not entering it! Why did it matter to them what we took back home!

Strangely, in the years to follow I became fond of Riyadh. We returned on a few occasions. Once you know a place and you know what to expect and what not to resist it becomes easier. I liked the food and I knew then how to approach things . . . with calmness and a

lot of patience. I guess one also matures and becomes more patient with age. In all the Arab countries we visited I learned that their governments rarely provided a lot of detail in advance. It was a question of hurry up and wait . . .

5

Op reis met ’n president

In 1996 het die president my weer gevra om hom op ’n staatsbesoek te vergesel, hierdie keer Frankryk toe. Ek was opgewonde oor die geleentheid om dié land te besoek, natuurlik ook omdat my voorgeslagte daarvandaan kom. Hierdie keer sou ek die enigste sekretaresse in die afvaardiging saam met hom wees, en dit was dus my eerste amptelike werksbesoek aan ’n oorsese land. In Parys het ’n vrou hom besoek en ek was agterdogtig oor haar. Sy het saam met Suid-Afrika se ambassadeur in Frankryk, Barbara Masekela, by die gastehuis aangekom. Barbara het haar reguit na die president se suite in die gastehuis geneem. Die suite het ’n eetkamer, sy eie sitkamer en baie ruimte gehad soos dit die blyplek van ’n president betaam. Maar Barbara het gou vertrek sonder die besoeker en die deur van die president se suite was toe. Ek het geweet dit was teen die protokol dat ’n deur toe is wanneer hy alleen saam met ’n vrou was. Ek het na Parks Mankahlana, die presidensiële woordvoerder, gegaan en paniekerig aangekondig dat die deur toe was en dat daar ’n vrou binne was. Parks het vir my gesê dis mevrou Graça Machel, die weduwee van wyle president Samora Machel van Mosambiek. Die eerste ding waaraan ek gedink het, was o goeiste, ek weet niks van hierdie geskiedenis nie, en toe: Wel, hulle het die deur toegemaak en ek kan in die moeilikheid kom daaroor.

Dit was een van die baie min kere dat Parks geïrriteerd met my was en hy het gesê ek moet dit los. En toe het ek.

Voor ons na ’n openbare onthaal vertrek het, het die president my

geroep en my amptelik aan mevrou Machel voorgestel. Hy het iets gesê wat ek baie jare daarna nog sou eerbiedig: 'Hierdie is tannie Graça Machel. Sy is 'n vriendin van my. Ons gaan nou hierdie geleentheid bywoon en ek wil hê jy moet heeltyd by haar bly. Jy mag haar nie onder jou oë laat uitgaan nie; ek wil hê jy moet na haar omsien.' Dit het my senuweeagtig gemaak omdat ek nie geweet het hoe ek hulle al twee sou kon oppas nie. Maar op een of ander manier het ek dit reggekry.

Terug in Suid-Afrika het dit aan die media uitgelek dat die president en mevrou Machel 'n verhouding het. Ek was eers geskok toe ek daarvan in die Sondagkoerante lees, want ek was bang iemand sou dink ek het dit aan die media gelek, maar Parks het my later laat weet dat dit met opset uitgelek is.

Op Woensdag, 12 Februarie 1997, was daar 'n debat in die parlement ná die president se staatsrede 'n paar dae tevore. Die debat was oor minderheidsgroepe se beskuldiging dat die regering bevooroordeeld is in keuses van ras by personeelaanstellings. Tydens die debat het die president gesê:

> Ek wil elkeen van julle uitdaag, geagte lede, om saam met my te kom, nie om te baklei nie [gelag], sodat ek aan julle kan wys jul propaganda is vals. Maar voor ek daarby uitkom, wil ek noem ek is dieselfde vraag gevra deur my vriend F.W. de Klerk: 'Hoekom is julle besig om rassisme omgekeerd aan te wend en om ons mense, die Afrikaner, te straf?'
>
> Ek het gesê: 'Goed, kan jy statistieke aan my voorlê: Hoeveel Afrikaners is afgedank, wanneer, en deur wie is hulle vervang?' Hy het gesê: 'Ek weet nie, ek het nie die feite by my nie.' Ek het gesê ek is verbaas dat 'n professor so 'n vraag aan die president van 'n land kan stel sonder enige feite. Ek het gesê ek sal hom tyd gee en gevra hoe lank hy nodig het om die feite voor te lê. Dit was die laaste keer dat ek hom gesien het [gelag].
>
> Ek wil sê, hoewel ons mag aan die mense gee teen wie daar in die verlede gediskrimineer is, tree ons sensitief op teenoor hulle wat daar was voordat ons oorgeneem het. Net buite hierdie saal is superintendent Riaan Smuts wat uit die apartheidsregering kom. Ek het sy dienste behou. Ek het twee wit sekretaresses uit die ou regering, tipiese Boeremeisies [gelag]. Hulle is Elize Wessels van Kakamas en Zelda le [*sic*] Grange van George. Die geagte lede kan kyk wie in my personeel is.

Ek het gelag toe ek dit hoor. Elize kom net so min van Kakamas af as wat ek van George af kom. My grootouers en my pa kom uit daardie geweste, en omdat ek hom vertel het ons gaan gereeld soontoe, het hy aanvaar George is my tuisdorp. Hy het dit aanhou glo, toe los ek dit maar. Mevrou Machel sou hom eers jare later reghelp, en daarna het die storie verdwyn. Dit het gelyk of hy teleurgesteld was dat sy eie storie nie akkuraat was nie.

Ná hierdie debat het ’n joernalis van die vrouetydskrif *Rooi Rose* my gebel. Hulle wou ’n storie doen oor ’n wit vrou wat ’n lyfwag is en wou my sommer insluit as een van die wit vroue na aan die president. Ek het eers nee gesê, maar iemand het dit onder die president se aandag gebring en hy het my na sy kantoor ontbied en aangesê om dit wel te doen. Die president het gesê as mense my vra om so iets te doen, moet ek nie weier nie. Ek was deel van die Regering van Nasionale Eenheid en hy sou nie slaag as hy iets aan die wêreld verkondig en dit nie in sy eie kantoor toepas nie. Teen dié tyd het ek verstaan wat die president van my wou hê. Dit was meer as net my werk. Ek het emosioneel afhanklik van hom begin raak terwyl hy my die kans van ’n leeftyd gebied het. Ek het nie al die vaardighede gehad wat die werk vereis het nie, maar hy wou seker maak dat ’n jong, wit Afrikanervrou, wat haar gemeenskap sou versinnebeeld, naby hom bly.

Ek het uitgesien na elke geleentheid wat ek naby die president kon wees. Hy was bedagsaam en wou altyd weet hoe dit met my gaan. Dit het gemaak dat ek my nog hegter daartoe verbind het om al sy pogings te ondersteun en ek het alles gedoen wat ek kon om my take goed te verrig. Maar die feit dat hy my regstreeks gekontak het en my by sy doen en late ingesluit het, het spanning in die kantoor veroorsaak. Om die vrede te bewaar het ek soveel tyd as moontlik in Kaapstad probeer deurbring, selfs wanneer die parlement in reses was, al is ek in Maart 1997 tot die pos van assistent- private sekretaresse bevorder.

My ouers het die feit dat ek so sterk tot die president verbind was en die manier waarop my houding verander het, interessant gevind. Uit die manier waarop ek oor hom gepraat het, kon hulle aanvoel hoeveel deernis ek vir hom gehad het. My pa het op die oog af skepties gelyk, maar my ma het my lojaliteit verwelkom en aangemoedig. Ek het by die huis nie veel oor my werk gepraat nie, maar hulle kon sien ek is geheel en al gefokus en toegewy. Hulle het my baie selde gesien en wanneer dit wel gebeur het, het ek die tyd gewoonlik omgeslaap. Ek het nie meer saam met vriende uitgegaan nie en ’n afstand tussen my en my sosiale lewe geskep. Soms om doelbewuste redes, maar nie altyd nie. Ek wou nie heeltyd uitgevra

word oor my werk nie. Ek het baie min vrye tyd gehad en wou daardie tyd gebruik om alles wat met my gebeur te verwerk en om planne te maak, maar ook om vir myself die ruimte te skep vir die dinge wat binne-in my verander het. As ek nou terugdink aan daardie negentien jaar, val al die dae saam in een groot stuk lewe. Alles het teen so 'n vaart gebeur dat ek dit moeilik vind om klein voorvalletjies te onthou. Daar was min tyd om alles te verwerk en alhoewel ek trots was en dankbaar en lojaal, het my werk geen plek vir enigiets anders toegelaat nie.

Deur my diens aan die president het ek die nuwe Suid-Afrika geheel en al aanvaar. Ek het van binne af verander en mense oor die algemeen makliker aanvaar en gerespekteer ondanks die kleur van ons velle, ons kulturele en politieke gelowe, die tekstuur van ons hare. Dit is iets wat party van my vriende en familielede moeilik verstaan het omdat hulle nooit self aan so 'n uiteenlopende klomp mense blootgestel was nie. In Suid-Afrika was ons nie gewoond aan kontak tussen mense van verskillende rasse nie, of dit nou platonies, romanties of professioneel van aard was. Ons het apart geleef en apart opgetree in ons knus kokonnetjies. Gesprekke met vriende het vir my moeilik begin raak namate ek begin het om mense van alle groepe te aanvaar. Ek het gereeld weggestap van gesprekke en gedink die bruin en swart mense wat saam met my werk is baie intelligenter as van die wit mense wat ek my vriende noem. Baie van my vriende het gedink hulle is beter as ander wat nie wit is nie. Ek het onverdraagsaam begin raak teenoor mense wat hulleself nie oopgestel het vir verandering nie, maar ek het terselfdertyd besef ek is bevoorreg danksy my nabyheid aan die president en kon vooroordeel dus makliker uitken.

Mense het my gereeld gevra of ek aanteken wat met my gebeur. En dan dink ek: Waar sou ek die tyd en energie kry om so iets te doen? Hulle sal sê ek het seker die wonderlikste plekke besoek, en ek sou dink ek kan nie onthou nie. Dan sal hulle sê ek het nie kinders nie en het nooit getrou nie, en tot vandag toe glimlag ek en gee gepaste antwoorde, maar ek dink: Waar op aarde sou al hierdie dinge met my kon gebeur die afgelope negentien jaar? Dit wat 'n mens is, word deur jou werk verslind en jy word wakker met bekommernisse en stres oor wat voorlê sonder om oor enigiets na te dink wat vir ander mense as vanselfsprekend sou voorkom.

Dit was in hierdie tyd dat my werksverhouding met die president 'n stappie vorentoe geneem sou word. Al was ek die meeste van die tyd in Kaapstad, het ek geweet hy was besig met samesprekings met Laurent Kabila, wat later president van die destydse Zaïre – nou die Demokratiese Republiek van die Kongo – sou word. Ondanks al die werk wat Madiba op 'n enkele dag as president verrig het, soos die behartiging van plaaslike sake, die stryd teen ander politieke partye en debatte oor veranderings en wetgewings, sou hy die volgende oggend na Zaïre vertrek en dieselfde aand terugkeer om betyds te wees vir samesprekings wat geskeduleer is met 'n besoekende staatsman 'n dag later. Hy het sy pligte nagekom sonder om ooit enigiets te kanselleer weens te veel druk. Hy was vasbeslote dat nie net Suid-Afrika by demokrasie moes baat vind nie. Afrika moes as 'n kontinent slaag en hy wou nuwe momentum aan dié idee gee.

Die Demokratiese Republiek van die Kongo aan die weskus van Afrika is ryk aan natuurlike hulpbronne, maar die land en sy mense is brandarm as gevolg van gulsigheid – dié van sy heerser en diktator van meer as twee dekades, president Mobutu Seso Seko – en 'n voortslepende burgeroorlog. Die president se plan was om Kabila en Mobutu sover te kry om in neutrale gebied te onderhandel, en dat dit sou lei tot 'n waardige politieke uittrede vir Mobutu sodat Kabila die regering kon oorneem tot voordeel van die land se mense. Die president het gehoop dat 'n vrye en regverdige demokratiese verkiesing sou volg. Kabila het gedreig om die regering met geweld omver te werp. Dit was in almal se belang dat 'n vreedsame oorgang beding word. Mobutu, wat ses-en-sestig jaar oud was en aan prostaatkanker gely het, het gesê hy sou nooit opsy staan vir Kabila nie. Maar internasionale druk was besig om toe te neem.

Om vir die gesprekke voor te berei, is 'n Suid-Afrikaanse vlootskip, die SAS Outeniqua, gestuur om in die internasionale waters naby die kus van Zaïre anker te gooi. Dit sou die neutrale gebied wees waar die twee partye byeen kon kom. Dae lank het gerugte dat Mobutu weier om Kabila op die skip te ontmoet die media oorheers. Nadat albei ingestem het om bymekaar te kom, het die president met die presidensiële vliegtuig, die Falcon 900, na Pointe Noire in Zaïre gevlieg om die vergadering by te woon en om seker te maak dit vind wel plaas. Hy sou later dieselfde aand na Suid-Afrika terugvlieg.

In daardie stadium was een van my pligte om die presidensiële vliegtuig te koördineer. Dit sou insluit die fynste besonderhede van vertreken aankomstye aan lugmagpersoneel, watter passassiers aan boord sou wees, watter maaltye tydens die vlugte genuttig sou word, asook die tye waarop die vliegtuig huiswaarts sou keer. Hulle sou die vertrek- en aankomstye aan albei kante aan my verskaf. Die program vir die dag sou dan hiervolgens bepaal word. Die president het spesifiek nie ’n sekretaresse op die reis saamgeneem nie omdat die onderhandelinge so sensitief was en omdat daar net mans op die SAS Outeniqua sou wees. Hy het dalk ook ’n voorgevoel gehad dat dinge dalk nie heeltemal volgens plan sou verloop nie. Hulle het in Pointe Noire aangekom en is per helikopter na die skip geneem. Daar het hy begin voorberei vir die vergadering.

Ek was die heeltyd in verbinding met die vlieëniers sodat ek kon bepaal wanneer hulle vertrek en die verwagte tyd van aankoms in Suid-Afrika aan al die partye kon meedeel.

Daardie aand het dit nie gebeur nie. Niemand het my iets laat weet nie en ek het die vlieëniers weer gebel om vas te stel wat hul planne was. Hulle het my in kennis gestel dat hulle nog steeds wag dat iemand hulle namens die president kontak om ’n vertrektyd te bevestig. Dit was reeds negeuur die aand en hulle het nie gedink daar is veel kans dat hy daardie aand sou terugkeer nie. Gelukkig het die president my toe gebel en gesê nie Kabila óf Mobutu het opgedaag vir die vergadering nie, maar hy het hulle deur ons ambassade laat weet hy wag. Die president het presies geweet hoe om ander mense op sy vlak op so ’n manier van sy wense in kennis te stel dat hulle verplig gevoel het om daarby in te val. En hy het vir die twee gewag om hom te antwoord. Hy het my laat weet hy gaan die nag op die skip deurbring om te kyk of hulle die volgende dag opdaag, en indien hulle dit nie doen nie, sou hy beslis die volgende oggend huiswaarts keer. Ek onthou dat ek hom gevra het of ek kan help van hierdie kant af, maar hy het gelag en gesê: ‘Nee, dis nie nodig nie.’

Hy het my toe gevra om mevrou Machel van sy situasie in kennis te stel en ek het dit gedoen. Elke keer as ek nuwe inligting van die president gekry het, het ek vir professor Gerwel, en ook die ministers van buitelandse sake en verdediging, laat weet. Ek het gevoel hulle almal moes weet dat ons president op een van ons vlootskepe op die

oop see is. Dit was tog die verstandige ding om te doen. Ek het geen opleiding gehad om sulke belangrike sake te hanteer nie en ek het nie geweet wat van my verwag word nie. Die president het ook gevra dat ek hom terugbel met mevrou Machel se antwoord. Ek het hom gebel en vir hom gesê sy stuur haar liefde en hoop dit gaan goed met hom en dat hy lekker sou slaap. Toe ek die skip se enigste satellietfoon skakel, het ’n jong man geantwoord en ek moes aan hom probeer verduidelik waarom ek as Afrikaanse vrou met die president moes praat. Vir hulle het dit verdag voorgekom.

Ek weet nie of die vlieëniers in ’n hotel of op die vliegtuig geslaap het nie, maar hulle het my in kennis gestel dat daar daardie nag geen vlug huis toe sou wees nie. Ek het die volgende oggend weer gebel, hierdie keer om die president in kennis te stel dat die bemanning nie persoonlike benodigdhede by hulle het nie en dat hulle na Suid-Afrika sou moes terugkeer om aflosbemanning te kry. Ingevolge lugvaartregulasies mag vlieëniers nie so lank op bystand gehou word nie. Tyd was min. Binnekort sou dit onwettig wees vir hulle om te vlieg, en dan sou daar geen aflosspan beskikbaar wees om die president huis toe te bring nie.

Dieselfde jong man het die foon geantwoord. Hierdie keer het hy die president gaan roep sonder om vrae te vra. Die president het by die trappe af gekom om die oproep te ontvang. ‘Ja, darling?’ het hy gevra. Teen daardie tyd het ek begin om hom Khulu te noem. Slegs by formele geleenthede en wanneer protokol dit van my vereis het, het ek hom Meneer die President genoem. Meeste ander mense het hom Madiba genoem of Tata, of president Mandela. Ek het Parks vir ’n naam gevra wat my gemakliker by die president sou laat voel en hy het Khulu voorgestel.

Ek het die situasie aan die president verduidelik, maar toe weer iets dom gevra: ‘Kan ek darem vir u persoonlike artikels en skoon klere stuur?’

Sy antwoord was: ‘Dit sal baie bedagsaam wees, maar stuur asseblief ook vir my koerante.’ Altyd koerante. Hy het elke dag al vyf die dagblaaie gelees wat in ons streek versprei word. Dit sluit dié in Afrikaans in. Hy het gereeld gesê die Afrikaanse koerante doen meer akkuraat verslag as die Engelse koerante. Ek het geraai hy bedoel dit

is omdat Afrikaans so ’n beskrywende taal is.

Sy huishouding het ’n pakkie opgemaak met alles wat hy sou nodig kry. Ons het dit teruggestuur saam met die vliegtuig, wat net die bemanning afgelaai en brandstof ingegooi het, en toe die aflosbemanning en kos vir die terugvlug opgelaai het. Die vars bemanning het om die een of ander rede geweet dit mag nog ’n dag of twee wees voor hulle sou terugkeer en het hul eie persoonlike artikels saamgeneem.

Die president het nooit telefoonnommers by hom gehad nie, maar teen hierdie tyd het hy my nommer uit sy kop geken en my gebel. (Dis ook hoekom, wanneer ek ook al nommers moes verander, Vodacom altyd nommers aan my sou toewys wat maklik was vir die president om te onthou.) Terwyl hy op die skip was, het hy my aanhou bel sodat ek ander mense kon skakel, vrae vra en hom dan teruggebel met hulle antwoorde. Mobutu het eers twee dae later opgedaag en dit het gelyk asof hy en Kabila gewillig was om oor ’n vreedsame skikking te onderhandel. Maar twee weke later het Zaïre se weermag Mobutu in kennis gestel dat hulle nie meer bereid was om hom te beskerm nie. Hy het uit die land gevlug en Kabila het homself tot staatshoof verklaar en die land se grondwet opgeskort.

Nadat hy na Kaapstad teruggekeer het, het die president ’n punt daarvan gemaak om my na sy kantoor te ontbied en te bedank vir my hulp en ondersteuning terwyl hy op die SAS Outeniqua was. Ek het trots gevoel omdat ek dinge aan die gang kon hou terwyl hy weg was, natuurlik met sy ondersteuning. Dit was vir my effens vreemd dat hy kon dink dat ek op enige ander manier sou kon optree. Maar dit was bedagsaam van hom. Dalk was dit op daardie oomblik dat ek besef het hy steun ook op my, en dit was duidelik dat ek altyd daar sou wees.

Op ’n dag het Mary my gestuur om iets by die droogskoonmakers op te laai. Ek is nie die soort mens wat opdragte bevraagteken nie, mits dit wettig is. Dis seker maar deel van my Calvinistiese agtergrond: Ons dien, ons gehoorsaam. Ons is altyd eerbiedig teenoor iemand in ’n hoër posisie as ons, dit maak nie saak wat mense ons vra nie.

Ek was op pad uit en die president was op pad in na sy kantoor en ons het by mekaar verbygestap. Ons het teen hierdie tyd ’n goeie werksverhouding gehad en ons was gemaklik by mekaar. Hy het gevra waarheen ek op pad was en ek het gesê ek moes gou vir Mary iets

gaan oplaai. Hy was woedend. 'Hoe kan jy so iets doen?' het hy gevra. Ek het gesê ek gee nie om nie, maar hy het vasgestaan: Dis verkeerd. Ek moes hom smeek om nie iets daaromtrent te doen nie, soos iemand wat jou pa vra om asseblief nie een van jou broers of susters te straf nie. Ek het besef ek moes hom nooit vertel het nie. Ek was regtig verbaas dat hy so kwaad was daaroor. Die president hou van sterk vroue, maar Mary was dalk té sterk. Hy het nooit daarvan gehou dat mense vir hom moes sê wat om te doen nie. Ek het agtergekom dat hy graag raad ontvang, maar dat hy nie wou hê mense moet aan hom voorskryf nie. Dit kan 'n mens seker verstaan van iemand wat in die tronk was. Daar moes hy sewe-en-twintig jaar lank die owerhede se instruksies volg, hul program van wanneer hy moes eet, slaap, oefening doen en die lig afskakel. Deur die bietjie vryheid wat hy nou gehad het, op te eis, was sy manier om in beheer van sy eie lewe te voel.

Hy het my kort daarna na sy huis ontbied. Ek het nie Johannesburg se paaie geken nie, maar teen daardie tyd kon ek van Pretoria na Houghton toe ry sonder om te verdwaal. Toe ek in Houghton aankom, het hy vir my briewe gegee om voor te berei, maar my gevra om in die sitkamer te sit en toe vir my een van die belangrikste goed gesê wat ek nog ooit gehoor het: 'Hier is geen plek vir lafaards nie. As jy hier 'n lafaard gaan wees, gaan jy nie baie lank uithou nie. Ek kan jou nie altyd verdedig nie, dus sal jy jouself moet verdedig deur die regte ding te doen.' Eers toe ek later huis toe ry, het ek besef hy het van die voorval gepraat by die kantoor daardie week en dat hy van my verwag om nie eenvoudig opdragte te aanvaar nie, maar om hulle te bevraagteken. Hierdie woorde sal my altyd bybly en in later jare, toe hy regtig nie meer daar was om my te verdedig nie, het dit my die krag gegee om vir myself op te staan.

Die president het ook daarop aangedring dat ek nou vir oorsese reise in aanmerking moes kom. Aangesien die sekretaresses beurte gemaak het om hom te vergesel, moes ek nou by daardie groep ingesluit word. Ek het kort daarna die taak gehad om saam met hom na Indië en Bangladesj te reis en daarna Engeland toe in die somer van 1997.

Die president is Oxford toe en daar is ek oorweldig deur die skoonheid van die dorpie en die ware Engelse platteland. Prins

Charles het die geleentheid by die Jesus College in Oxford bygewoon. Dit was nadat sy egskeiding van prinses Diana bekend gemaak is en ons almal was ’n bietjie skrikkerig. Die president was sjarmant soos altyd en ondanks al die negatiewe berigte oor die koningsgesin, was hy uiters hoflik teenoor prins Charles. Die president het mense nie veroordeel nie.

Vroeër daardie jaar het prinses Diana Angola en Suid-Afrika besoek. Die president was uiters beïndruk deur haar gebaar om pasiënte in Angola te besoek wat MIV/vigs gehad het. Sy het op hul beddens gesit en met hulle gesels. Sy het gehelp om die stigma wat aan vigspasiënte gekoppel is, af te breek. Hy het gesê ’n prinses wat op ’n vigspasiënt se bed sit, wys dat mense niks te vrees het nie en dat ons na mense met vigs moet omsien. Op die dag wat prinses Diana hom in Genadendal in Kaapstad besoek het, het die president in sy sitkamer aangekom met sy pantoffels aan. Hy het vergeet om sy skoene aan te trek en nederig vir prinses Diana om verskoning gevra toe almal in die vertrek hoor hy versoek dat iemand sy skoene in sy kamer gaan haal. Die prinses het haar glad nie van stryk laat bring nie. President Mandela kon maklik vir homself lag en klein verleenthede met ander deel.

Dit het vir my al hoe moeiliker geword om my verlede en hede met mekaar te versoen. Ek was ’n dogter van apartheid, en tog het ek die man teen wie my Afrikaner-landgenote my gewaarsku het, gedien en ondersteun. Ek is gelei en ek het baie geleer by Parks en Tony Trew, die direkteur van kommunikasie in ons kantoor. Eendag het ek die moed bymekaargeskraap om vir hulle te sê ek moet met iemand praat om vrede met myself te kan maak. Dit het my gepla dat ek so onkundig was terwyl ek met die apartheidswette grootgeword het. Hulle het voorgestel dat ek met eerwaarde Beyers Naudé gaan gesels. Ek het ook vir Ronnie Kasrils, wat in president Mandela se kabinet gedien het, ontmoet. Hy was ook een van die eerste bevelvoerders van MK, wat verantwoordelik was vir die beplanning van die bomontploffing in Kerkstraat in 1983 toe ons my pa ’n hele paar uur lank nie kon opspoor nie. Ek het ’n stryd in myself gehad en nie geweet wat is reg en wat is verkeerd nie. Beyers Naudé het sy loopbaan begin as ’n dominee in die NG Kerk, maar het later die kerk verlaat nadat hy hom teen apartheid uitgespreek het en vir ’n hele klompie jare in huisarres geplaas is. Tog was hy glad nie bitter nie. Ek

het ’n bietjie van hom geweet, maar dit was beperk tot die feit dat hy deur sy mede-Afrikaners beskou is as iemand wat sy geboortereg verkoop het. Parks en Tony het gereël dat ek saam met oom Bey, soos wat hy bekend gestaan het, kon tee drink.

Ek het senuweeagtig alleen Johannesburg toe gery om hom te gaan sien. Met my aankoms het sy vrou my ontmoet en saam met my en hom in die sitkamer gesit. Dit het vir my gevoel asof ek deur my eie grootouers ontvang is. Hulle was liefdevol en gasvry, al het die hulle my nog nooit voorheen ontmoet nie en baie min van my geweet. Ek het my storie aan hulle vertel en sowat twee uur lank gesels oor die lewe en oor godsdiens, en oom Bey het gesê ek moenie druk op myself plaas deur verantwoordelikheid te wil aanvaar vir almal om my en vir dit wat apartheid gedoen het nie. Hy het gesê ek moet vrede maak met die feit dat dié reis deel van my ontwaking was. Ons het saam gebid en ek was emosioneel. Ek was baie dankbaar teenoor die Here vir die groot geleenthede in my lewe en al my seëninge, en tog was dit dieselfde God wat na my oordeel toegelaat het dat apartheid gebeur het en dat Nelson Mandela vir sewe-en-twintig jaar in ’n tronksel opgesluit is. My ontdekkingsreis het vrae ingesluit oor die rol van georganiseerde godsdiens en ek het tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat my verhouding met God ’n persoonlike saak is waarvan net ek verantwoording kan doen aan myself en eendag aan Hom. Hierdie reis het inderdaad my geloofsoortuigings op ’n vreemde manier laat verander en ek het met my ma gestry oor die skepping van instellings deur mense, wat dan daarop aanspraak maak dat daardie instellings deur God geskep is.

Soms het mevrou Machel saam met ons oorsee gereis en soms was sy eenvoudig te besig met haar eie werk. Teen dié tyd het sy ’n permanente deel van die president se lewe begin word en hy het gereeld gespog met die belangrike werk wat sy verrig. Sy het baie amptelike geleenthede bygewoon, maar ook tyd alleen saam met hom deurgebring. Ek het geweet sy maak die president baie gelukkig wanneer sy by hom was, en daarom het ek hul private oomblikke saam ywerig beskerm.

Aan die begin was ek nogal versigtig vir mevrou Machel. Die president het baie pligte gehad om na te kom en doelwitte wat hy wou bereik, en dan wou die wêreld nog gehad het hy moet heeltyd oral

wees. Sy mikpunte was hoofsaaklik op onderwys en versoening gerig, maar hy wou Suid-Afrikaners ook verenig en die land meer stabiel maak. Hy wou 'n gunstige klimaat skep waarin die ekonomie kon groei. Ek was gereeld in die middel en moes seker maak dat hy tevrede was met die pas waarteen hy gewerk het en dat hy genoeg tyd het om aan sy pligte as man te bestee.

Dit het my baie jare geneem om 'n stewige werksverhouding met mevrou Machel te skep. Ek het nie van haar verwag om van my te hou nie. Dit was my regering en my mense wat die vliegtuig neergeskiet het waarin haar man, Samora Machel, in 1986 dood is. In later jare, toe ons veel nader aan mekaar was, het ek haar en haar kinders gevra om my meer te vertel van die gebeure rondom sy dood. Dit was pynlik, maar deur oor hierdie dinge te praat, vermoed ek sy het ook gesien dat ek 'n sekere begrip het van hul pyn en verlies, iets wat hulle waardeer het.

(Ná Madiba se afsterwe het ek ook die geleentheid gehad om Samora junior se twee seuns, Samora III en Malick, vir die eerste keer in tien jaar weer te sien en die ooreenkoms met hul oupa is treffend.)

Die Machels is warm, gasvrye mense wat omgee en ondanks die eise vroeg in ons samesyn, is ons nou baie na aan mekaar. Ek voel nog altyd na aan mevrou Machel se kinders. Hulle sê die lewe verg 'n klein bietjie tyd en baie 'verhouding'. Ek en mevrou Machel sou lank moes bou aan ons verhouding, maar daar was harde werk aan albei kante en vandag kan ek my nie 'n lewe indink sonder haar invloed en die stabiliteit wat sy aan my klein wêreldjie skenk nie. Ek erken ook dat twee mense aan 'n verhouding moet werk en ek moet soveel skuld aanvaar vir die moeilike tye tussen ons as wat ek aan haar wil toesê.

Aan die begin het ek gedink mevrou Machel het maar net probeer om haar posisie as die vrou in die president se lewe te vestig en ek het gevoel haar verwagtinge van ons was te hoog. Maar dan het ek weer gesien hoe sy die president laat glimlag. Sy het sy gevoelens binne hom opnuut wakker gemaak. Sy het hom toegelaat om te lewe. Sy het hom laat dans en die skoonheid van blomme laat raaksien. Na mooi musiek laat luister en op die wonder in elke sonsondergang en sonsopkoms te let. Op baie van ons reise het sy daarop aangedring dat ons saam na die sonsondergang kyk, iets wat Madiba soveel jare misgeloop het terwyl hy in 'n sel toegesluit is voor die son ondergaan.

Sy het 'n verskil gemaak aan die manier waarop hy die lewe waardeer. Sy het gemaak dat hy 'n groter liefde vir die lewe ontwikkel het as wat ek gedink het moontlik is. As jy regtig lief is vir iemand, soos wat ek lief was vir Madiba, wil jy net die beste vir hulle hê en jy wil hê hulle moet gelukkig wees. Wanneer hy saam met haar was en hy het weer die lewe voel bruis, ondanks sy druk werksprogram, was hy waarlik gelukkig. Ek het stadig tot die besef gekom dat sy nie net daar was om haar plek op te eis nie; sy was daar om hom gelukkig te maak en hy was selfs 'n beter baas vir ons danksy haar. Daar was geen groter geskenk in Nelson Mandela se lewe as dit wat Graça Machel met haar teenwoordigheid aan hom gebring het nie.

Dit is die teenoorgestelde van Winnie Madikizela-Mandela se teenwoordigheid in my lewe. Ek het haar eers baie later in my lewe ontmoet en haar nooit gesien tydens Madiba se presidentskap nie. Dit het nie gelyk of sy deel was van die president se lewe nadat hulle uitmekaar is nie. Hy het nooit oor haar gepraat nie en ek het nie uitgevra nie. Niemand hoef dit vir jou te sê nie, jy kom self agter dis iets waaroor jy nie moet praat nie. Later het hy meer openlik en vertroulik met my oor hierdie gebeure in sy lewe gepraat. Maar soms het hy hartseer gelyk, en dan het ek gewonder oor die stille pyn wat hy moes verduur.

Wanneer ek by die president se huis aankom, het ek hom gereeld gevind waar hy alleen by die tafel sit vir ontbyt of aandete. Middagete het hy gewoonlik in sy ampswonings in Pretoria of Kaapstad genuttig. By sy huis in Houghton kon 'n mens nie anders nie as om 'n eensaamheid aan te voel waar hy alleen sit en eet. Eers nadat mevrou Machel sy lewe binnegekom het, het dit verander. Dit was asof daar 'n lig in die somber huishouding geval het. Asof die gordyne oopgetrek is en dit die hele huis met lewe gevul het.

Wanneer 'n mens by hom gaan sit het, het hy begin stories vertel. Stories oor die tronk en sy grootwordjare in die Transkei. Hy het maaltye gebruik om na te dink en te ontspan. Ek het graag na sy stories geluister, en aangesien ek nog altyd 'n goeie verbeelding gehad het, was dit maklik vir my om prentjies te vorm en feitlik saamgevoer te word na die toneel wat hy beskryf. Hy het my gereeld vertel van Justice, die seuntjie saam met wie hy grootgeword het en wat sy beste

vriend was. Justice was meer as 'n vriend; hy was die 'broer' wat Madiba nooit gehad het nie. Hulle het saam weggeloop toe hulle onverwags uitvind daar word trouplanne vir hulle gesmee deur die koninklike familielid wat vir Madiba grootgemaak het, soos mense destyds volgens hulle tradisie op die platteland gemaak het. Madiba en Justice het uit die Transkei Johannesburg toe gevlug, waar sy lewe deur politiek gevorm is. Hy het met deernis oor Justice gepraat. Ongelukkig is Justice oorlede terwyl Madiba in die tronk was. As gevolg van te veel drank, het Madiba gesê.

Ek het gereeld oor Justice nagedink en as daar een mens is wat ek gewens het nog 'n deel van ons lewe kon uitmaak, is dit hy. Ek wou gehad het Justice moes weet wat met sy vriend gebeur het en ek wou gehad het hy moes weet 'n mens kan iets van jou lewe maak, al is jou grootwordjare hoe nederig. Ek wou die horlosie terugdraai en hom waarsku dat hy moet ophou drink en vir hom sê hy en sy beste vriend sou eendag weer herenig. Ek weet hy sou na die inhuldiging genooi gewees het as hy nog gelewe het, en ek kon my net voorstel hoe groot sy blydskap en opwinding sou wees terwyl sy beste vriend die eed aflê. Maar ek vermoed terwyl Madiba in die tronk was, het Justice dalk moed opgegee dat hy die armoede in sy familie tot 'n einde kon bring en hom aan drank oorgegee.

Madiba se weemoed oor Justice, saam met die herinneringe aan sy jeugjare in Qunu en sy adolessensie in Mqekezweni, het 'n groot deel van sy stiltetyd in beslag geneem. Dit was asof hy na die ou eenvoudige dae gereis het om vrede en homself te vind. Oor en oor sou ek hom aantref waar hy terugdink aan sy kinderdae. Dit het gelyk asof daardie dae hom nie net gevorm het as 'n man en sy waardes bepaal het nie. Sy herinneringe het ook 'n manier geword om te ontsnap. Dit was waarskynlik 'n oorlewingsmeganisme wat hy in die tronk gebruik het. Herinneringe aan waar hy beeste oppas, aan stokgevegte deelneem, in die Oos-Kaapse heuwels stap, waar hy na die stam se wysgere luister, heuningkoeke steel of appelliefies vind, het soos rolprente geword wat in sy kop afspeel. Hy kon enige tyd daarna kyk wanneer die ongenaakbare werklikheid van die tronk of sy presidentskap te veel geword het. Hierdie beelde, hierdie landelike tonele in sy kop, het hy saam met die stories soveel keer herhaal dat die meeste van ons sy gefluisterde herinneringe woord vir woord kan

oorvertel. Maar dis nie my stories nie, dis sy stories.

Toe Madiba uit die tronk vrygelaat is, het al sy jeugvriende al grootgeword of weggedryf. Dit was vir hom moeilik om emosioneel oop te maak. Die tronk het hom geleer om sy gevoelens weg te steek. Ek het gesien hoe hy probeer oopmaak wanneer hy saam met sy kleinkinders was, maar hy was steeds terughoudend en dissipline was vir hom belangrik. Dis iets waarvan kleintjies nie baie hou nie. Terwyl hy in die tronk was, het hy na sy kinders verlang en hy wou graag saam met hulle wees. Maar dit was nie moontlik nie.

Ek sou die president gereeld in Johannesburg besoek, aangesien hy bitter selde by die ampswoning in Pretoria oorgeslaap het. In daardie stadium het vier van sy kleinkinders by hom gewoon. Hulle was die seuns van Makgatho, Madiba se enigste oorlewende seun uit sy huwelik met sy eerste vrou, Evelyn. Mandla, die oudste kleinkind, was in sy laaste hoërskooljaar. Ndaba, die tweede oudste, was ’n tiener, en dan was daar die twee kleuterseuns, Mbuso en Andile. Hulle was liefdevol en te pragtig vir woorde. Hulle pa het êrens in Soweto gewoon en Madiba het dit geniet om hulle by hom te hê. Vir alle praktiese doeleindes sou ’n mens kon sê die huishoudster, Xoliswa, wat hulle ‘Mamma’ genoem het, en Rochelle het hulle grootgemaak. Rochelle is later weg. Hulle het lewe in die huis geblaas en ’n gesinsgevoel in Houghton geskep.

In die vroeë jare was ek gereeld alleen in Kaapstad, met die ander personeellede in Pretoria. Ek het die president se persoonlike kantoorskakelbord behartig toe ek eendag na die ingang van die gebou geroep is. Die polisie wat daar aan diens was, het my in kennis gestel dat daar besoekers was wat na die president se kantoor toe wou kom. Dit was genoeg rede vir my om op te staan en hulle by ontvangs te ontmoet, aangesien niemand in die president se kantoor toegelaat is nie. Daar aangekom, is ek voorgestel aan iemand van NI (Nasionale Intelligensie, maar ek het dit nie dadelik gesnap nie). Ek het dit vreemd gevind dat twee mans sommer uit die bloute by ontvangs sou opdaag en sê hulle moet die president se kantoor ‘vee’. Ek het geen idee gehad waarvan hulle praat nie en ewe onskuldig vir hulle gesê daar is baie skoonmakers wat die kantoor elke dag uitvee, baie dankie.

Die polisie wat by die ingang werk het later vir my gesê die mans was offisiere van Nasionale Intelligensie en dat hulle die term ‘vee’

gebruik wanneer hulle meeluisterapparaat soek wat ander partye daar kon geplant het. Ek het erg verbouereerd gevoel en hulle laat ingaan. Vir baie jare sou die veiligheidsmense my hieroor terg. Ek het my nie daaraan gesteur nie. Dit was alles deel van die nuwe wêreld wat besig was om vir my oop te gaan – ’n ander planeet in vergelyking met my verlede.

Daardie somer is ek ook gevra om die president op ’n besoek van twee dae na Bali te vergesel, gevolg deur ’n staatsbesoek aan Indonesië en Thailand, waar mevrou Machel by ons sou aansluit. Daar is teen dié tyd algemeen aanvaar dat ek, hoewel ek steeds die senior ministeriële tikster was, die presidensiële geselskap om die beurt sou vergesel op oorsese reise om die dienste van ’n sekretaresse te lewer. In daardie jare was ek te bang om enigiets te geniet en ek het nie die water van die swembad of die see benut nie. Ek wou in my kamer bly ingeval die president my sou soek. En hy het ook. Hy het gewoond geraak aan die feit dat ek altyd daar was, en ek het geslaap wanneer hy slaap, geëet wanneer hy eet en sy roetine gevolg om seker te maak ek is altyd beskikbaar wanneer hy my soek.

Deel van ons pligte was om seker te maak dat hy sy kos op die regte tye kry, dat sy klere uitgesit en weer teruggepak was wanneer mevrou Machel nie by was nie, en dat dinge om hom presies was soos hy dit wou hê. In hierdie program moes ons ook ander dingetjies inpas. Hy moes byvoorbeeld elke tweede dag gemasseer word en elke dag se koerantuitknipsels moes na hom gestuur word, aangesien ons uiteraard nie die Suid-Afrikaanse koerante daar kon kry nie. Ek het seker gemaak dat daardie stories voor ontbyt by hom aankom en alles in my vermoë gedoen om te verseker dat hulle presies is soos hy hulle verkies. Maak nie saak in watter tydsone ons ons bevind het nie, die arme personeel op kantoor moes skofte werk om te verseker dat die uitknipsels betyds aan hom gestuur word. Selfs nadat rekenaars en die internet ons lewe begin oorheers het, wou hy nog steeds die uitknipsels hê. Presies dit: stories wat uit koerante geknip word, waarvan fotostate gemaak en aan hom gefaks word. Waar ons ook al was. Ek het my bes probeer om ander alternatiewe in te bring, onder meer om die las op die personeel in Suid-Afrika te verlig, maar hy het aangedring op die oorspronklike stories soos hulle verskyn het en in die koerant se gewone lettertipe.

Die president was ook altyd ongemaklik daarmee om alleen te wees saam met die terapeute wat die masserings doen. Ek of ’n veiligheidsmens moes te alle tye by wees wanneer die terapeute in die kamer was. Dit was vir my baie frustrerend, want ek is nie die soort mens wat ’n uur lank kan stilsit nie. Dit was die dae voordat ons slimfone gehad het en ek het regtig niks gehad waarmee ek die tyd kon verwyl nie. Ek het dikwels probeer om veiligheidsmense te oorreed om vir my in te staan, maar die president sou my laat roep as hy sien ek is nie daar nie. Ek het aanhou probeer, seker meer as ’n honderd keer, maar hy het my altyd teruggeroep, totdat ek eendag aan hom verduidelik het dat ek regtig nie so lank kan stilsit nie. En hy het toe aanvaar dat een van die veiligheidsmense by hom sou moes sit, wat natuurlik ook prakties meer sin gemaak het. Dit beteken dat ek nog ’n uur aan my werk kon bestee en nie agter raak nie, of dinge kon reël. Ek het gewonder wat ek in elk geval in ’n noodgeval sou kon doen. Uit ’n veiligheidsoogpunt was dit tog beter om ’n lyfwag daar te hê. En dit het my minstens ’n uur gegee om ander dinge te doen, soos om e-posse kantoor toe te stuur, deur die program te lees en oproepe te beantwoord.

Die president het die uitsonderlike vermoë gehad om dinge so te vereenvoudig dat ’n mens iets op die vinnigste moontlike manier kon doen of verstaan. Hy het altyd vir my gesê Oliver Tambo, ’n ander held uit die vryheidstryd en voormalige president van die ANC, wou nooit gemasseer word nie en die president was oortuig dat sy medestryder sodoende ’n kans verspeel het om sy lewe te verleng. Wat hy bedoel het, was dat hy gedink het oom Oliver, wat aan ’n beroerte dood is, sou die stres en druk beter kon verwerk as hy geleer het om te ontspan en beter na sy gesondheid omgesien het met gereelde massering en fisioterapie. Die president het ’n unieke manier gehad om stories te vertel en hy sou presies dieselfde woorde en frases gebruik wanneer hy die staaltjie ’n tweede keer vertel. Hulle was kosbaar. En die oortuiging waarmee hy sy teorie oor meneer Tambo oorgedra het, het gemaak dat ek my later verbeel ek moes my ook laat masseer wanneer daar te veel druk op my was.

Van Bali af is ons op ’n staatsbesoek na die Indonesiese hoofstad, Djakarta. Ek het nie veel van Djakarta gesien nie, want al wat ons ervaar het, was hitte en vogtigheid. Maar terwyl ons daar was, het die

president 'n spesiale ontmoeting gehad. Dit het in die geheim gebeur. Hy het ingestem om Indonesië te besoek op een voorwaarde: dat hy Xanama Gusmão kon ontmoet. Die Indonesiërs het reëlings vir dié besoek aanvanklik uitgestel, waarskynlik omdat hulle gedink het die president sou nie op dié voorwaarde aandring nie, maar hy het. Een nag is Gusmão, die leier van die weerstandsbeweging in Oos-Timor, in die geheim via die presidensiële gastehuis se stel noodtrappe ingesmokkel. Gusmão is beskou as die ekwiwalent van die politieke gevangene wat Madiba tydens sy tronkjare was. Hy het boeie aan sy hande gehad. Die besoek was vir my opwindend en ek het gewonder hoe die president daaroor voel. Dit was immers net sewe jaar nadat hy self uit die tronk vrygelaat is.

Gusmão het onder die omstandighede goed gelyk en hy was vriendelik. Hy was 'n tydjie lank alleen saam met die president en professor Gerwel en andere. Daarna is hy teruggeneem tronk toe. Daar is ooreengekom dat hy toegelaat sou word om Suid-Afrika 'n paar weke later te besoek, waar hy vrymoedig sou kon praat. President Suharto het ingestem en 'n paar weke later het ons Gusmão in Suid-Afrika ontvang. Dit was dié keer minder opwindend, aangesien hy nie meer geboei was of selfs soos 'n gevangene in gewone klere gelyk het nie. Jare later het hy Madiba na sy aftrede in Johannesburg besoek om hom te bedank vir die samesprekings, en eers toe is ek herinner aan die gebeure van daardie nag. Hy was toe nie net 'n vry man nie, maar die wettige president van 'n onafhanklike Oos-Timor. Dit word algemeen aanvaar dat Madiba se ingryping die nodige druk op president Suharto geplaas het om Gusmão vry te laat.

Waar daar ook al konflik in die wêreld was, sou mense die president vra om betrokke te raak en vir 'n vreedsame oplossing onderhandel. Hy het baie van hierdie versoeke om by ander lande se plaaslike probleme in te meng van die hand gewys, omdat hy gesê het hy het nie genoeg kennis van die fyner besonderhede en van die betrokke land se probleme nie. Maar hy het tog die politieke wil gehad om te help waar dit moontlik was, en waar hy gedink het hy het 'n kans om sukses te behaal het hy gedoen wat hy kon.

Van Indonesië af is ons Bangkok toe. Ons het in 'n luukse hotel gebly en ek het besef ek was besig om 'n kenner te word van hotelle reg oor die wêreld. Maar hoewel ek die kamerdiens-spyskaarte kon

opsê, het ek nie veel van enige stad te siene gekry nie. My ervarings was beperk tot die president se besoeke aan plaaslike besienswaardighede. Ons was nie daar vir vakansie nie, ons was daar vir werk. Die president het nou en dan gevra om iets te gaan sien. Dit was gewoonlik die vernaamste toeristeaantreklikhede of iets waaroor hy gelees het en graag wou sien. Gewoonlik het ons nie tyd hiervoor gehad nie, want sy program was volgepak met vergaderings en tyd wat opsy gesit moes word om te rus. Hy was nege-en-sewentig jaar oud en hy moes rus wanneer hy moontlik kon.

Hoewel ek feitlik elke oomblik van my lewe gebruik het om die president se dag glad te laat verloop, was ek nie altyd baie diplomaties of polities korrek nie. In Thailand het ons aangesit vir 'n amptelike middagete saam met die eerste minister, Chuan Leekpai. Teen dié tyd het die protokolspanne wat die voorafplanne maak geweet die president wil oogkontak met sy sekretaresses hê. Dit het beteken dat hy, indien hy enigiets sou nodig kry, net na hulle kon kyk en hulle sou weet. Sitplekke is daarvolgens uiteengesit. Dié dag kon ek sy gesig sien, maar gelukkig was ek nie naby genoeg aan hom dat hy kon sien wat volgende gebeur het nie.

Ek het 'n bloes met lang, wye moue aangehad. Die voorgereg is bedien met broodrolletjies op ons kleinbordjies. Ek het my hand na die botter op die tafel uitgesteek en nie agtergekom my mou vang my broodrolletjie nie. Ek het die houer met die botter opgetel om nader aan my neer te sit. Die broodrolletjie het teen my mou afgerol tot by my elmboog. Ek het geskrik omdat ek gedink het iets het teen my mou opgekruip. Ek was klaar senuweeagtig omdat ek nie geweet het wat ek eet nie, en wat hier gebeur het, het nie veel gehelp nie. Ek het my arm teruggepluk en die broodrolletjie het tot in die middel van die tafel gevlieg. Stilte het om my neergedaal. Gelukkig is die Thaise mense baie vriendelik en gasvry. Hulle het geweet dis net 'n glipsie en die man langs my het gesê dat dit 'n goeie teken was. My eerste gedagte was dat alles in hierdie land 'n goeie teken is, ongeag hoe rampspoedig dit vir ons as buitestanders mag lyk. Ek het sy goeie wense aanvaar en versigtig 'n nuwe rolletjie opgetel en my verleentheid met elke happie van die brood weggesluk.

Die president het onophoudelik gereis en gewerk. As hy by die huis was, sou hy tyd opsy skuif om vakbonde soos die Nasionale

Mynwerkersvakbond, die Nasionale Metaalwerkersvakbond van Suid-Afrika en die Nasionale Opvoedings- en Gesondheidswerkersvakbond te spreek. Hy het altyd ’n balans probeer skep en hy wou seker maak hy tree in elke moontlike situasie regverdig op. Hy was vasberade om die eerste boustene te lê vir ’n Suid-Afrika met welvaart in sy toekoms. Maar in Julie 1996 het hy in die openbaar aangekondig dat hy net vir een termyn van vyf jaar as president sou dien. Hy het eerlikwaar geglo jonger mense sou meer as hy kon vermag en deur aan te kondig dat hy net een termyn sou dien, het hy gehoop ander staatshoofde sou sy voorbeeld volg en nie in die versoeking kom om magshonger te raak en aan beheer vas te klou en diktators te word nie.

By elke openbare geleentheid het hy gevra om die polisie aan diens agterna te groet, en wanneer daar ’n koor opgetree het, wou hy elke lid se hand ook skud. Hy sou ook altyd kinders in ’n skare opmerk en hulle roep om vorentoe te kom sodat hy hulle kan groet. Aan die begin het ek gedink dis iets waarvoor hy net soms tyd sou hê, maar toe ek besef hy doen dit by elke geleentheid, het ek dit by my planne begin insluit wanneer ek by ’n geleentheid opdaag. Dit was sy manier om erkenning aan die ‘klein mensies’ te gee.

Maar hy kon baie streng wees met mense wat hy gevoel het nie lojaal teenoor hom is nie. Hy sou gee, gee en gee, maar wanneer daar die geringste aanduiding is dat iemand hom nie honderd-en-twintig persent ondersteun nie, sou hy vinnig bande met hulle verbreek. Hy het lojaliteit geïnspireer en van jou verwag om getrou te wees. Dit is wat met Mary Mxadana gebeur het. Die werksverhouding tussen Mary en die president het by die dag meer spanning opgelewer. Mary was vriende met Winnie en dit het hom gepla. Hy het gevra dat sy na ’n diplomatieke pos by die departement van buitelandse sake oorgeplaas word. Mary is sonder enige drama daar weg. Ek was baie hartseer toe ek haar later in die hospitaal besoek het ná ’n breukoperasie, wat uiteindelik tot haar dood sou lei. Ek sal haar altyd dankbaar wees vir die rol wat sy in my lewe gespeel het.

Die president sou die Kersvakansie saam met sy kleinkinders in Qunu deurbring. Dis die dorpie waar hy grootgeword het. Dit is in die Oos-Kaap, dertig kilometer suidwes van ’n dorp met die naam Mthatha in wat vroeër as die Transkei bekend gestaan het. Teen daardie tyd het Rochelle, wat hom opgepas het, na Amerika vertrek om verder te

studeer en die president het op my gesteun om om te sien na sekere sake wat sy vroeër behartig het. Een van hulle was om ’n Kerspartytjie te reël op sy plaas in Qunu vir die kinders van die omgewing. Wel, dit is wat dit veronderstel was om te wees.

Hy het ’n lys opgestel van ’n paar mense wat ek moes bel en vra vir skenkings van lekkers, speelgoed en ander eenvoudige Kersfeesbederfies. Die eerste jaar wat ek betrokke was, was daar tweeduisend van alles. Ek het verantwoordelikheid aanvaar vir die taak om alles op te tel en seker te maak dat dit ’n paar dae voor Kersfees in Qunu aankom. Ek het besef ons het sakke nodig, dus het ek sakke gekoop en die kinders van die gemeenskap en selfs ons veiligheidsmense betrokke gekry om pakkies op te maak vir die tweeduisend kinders wat op Kersdag by die president se huis verwag is. Ek het naby die huis iets soos ’n fabriek bewimpel en ons het pakkies opgemaak, met slegs enkele dae oor voor Kersfees. Soms het ons moed verloor, so oorweldig raak ’n mens deur tweeduisend van alles. ’n Mens weet eers wat tweeduisend regtig beteken nadat jy tweeduisend pakkies hanteer en opgemaak het. Ek het die president eers nie geglo toe hy vir my sê dat dit vir baie kinders hulle enigste behoorlike maaltyd sou wees of die enigste Kersgeskenk wat hulle sou ontvang nie. Maar hy was natuurlik reg. Op Kersdag het duisende kinders op Qunu toegesak.

Die meeste swart mense in Suid-Afrika was bitter arm, en dit is ongelukkig steeds die geval. Dit sou baie tyd neem om die ekonomiese verandering teweeg te bring tot op ’n punt waar dit die plattelandse gemeenskappe sou bevoordeel. Intussen het dit effens verander, maar nie naastenby so vinnig soos wat ons gehoop het nie en mense op die platteland is kwaad en teleurgesteld omdat demokrasie nog niks vir hulle beteken het nie. En terwyl die skare op Qunu toegesak het, het ek agtergekom dat die mense in hierdie gemeenskappe nog glad nie die vrugte van ons nuutgewonne vryheid gepluk het nie. Toe ek gevra het waar hulle vandaan kom, het die president gesê dat sommige van hulle al die vorige nag begin loop het om betyds daar te kon wees. Toe ek op Kersdag van die dorp af by die plaas aankom, was dit seweuur die oggend. Ek het gedink ek sou betyds wees voor die skares opdaag. Maar teen daardie tyd het die kinders al ’n kilometer lank tou gestaan, langs die heining van die plaas, teen die heuwel op. Ek kon

my oë nie glo nie. Ons het gereed gemaak om pakkies uit te deel en daarna sou die kinders na die tuin agter die huis geneem word waar hulle kos sou kry. Die baie vriendelike Mr Bread, ’n bakkery in Mthatha, het onderneem om kos te berei vir die oudstes en die belangrike mense van die gebied saam met Madiba se oudste kleinkind, Mandla.

Kinders het kort daarna deur die hekke begin stroom. Die president het die grootste deel van die dag buite gesit en kinders gegroet soos hulle aangestap kom om hulle pakkies te ontvang voor hulle gaan eet. Hy het elke kleintjie se hand geskud, een vir een, en ’n vinnige geselsie met hulle aangeknoop. Omdat die president so ’n gedissiplineerde en georganiseerde mens is, het hy dit waardeer dat alles so stiptelik gebeur het en so goed georganiseer was. Kinders het in gelid verbygestap en hul verrassingspakkies van die helpers ontvang. Daarna is hulle na die plek gelei waar die kos bedien is. Ek het seker gemaak niks word agterweë gelaat nie en hulle het almal ’n kans gekry om sy hand te skud terwyl hy buite gesit het.

Aangesien baie van hulle glad nie geweet het van die gebruik dat Kersvader geskenke uitdeel nie, was hierdie ’n droom wat vir hulle waar geword het. Hulle wou hul geskenke van president Mandela ontvang. ’n Maatskappy het frisbees vir al die pakkies geskenk, en kort voor lank het duisende van die goed die hele plek vol gevlieg en mense moes net koes. Dalk sou balle ’n beter keuse gewees het en dalk was daar ’n geringer kans dat hulle jou teen die kop sou tref. ’n Mens aanvaar dat alle kinders weet wat ’n frisbee of ’n bal is totdat jy sien hoe kinders op die Suid-Afrikaanse platteland leef, dan verstaan jy dat hulle baie goed nie sal herken waaraan ons gewoond is nie. Een jaar wou iemand speelgeweertjies van plastiek skenk, maar ons moes nee sê, want ons wou nie die gedagte van geweld in ons land aanmoedig nie. Die kinders was nie honderd persent seker wat vir hulle die lekkerste was nie: om die pakkie te ontvang of om die president se hand te skud. Dit was kostelik om te aanskou. Die president was reg oor die belangrikheid van hierdie maaltyd. Al die bewyse was daar. Ek het kinders gesien wat bitter siek was, siektes wat ek seker was nie eens name gehad het nie. Ondervoed, misvorm, mishandel en afgeskeep. Ek kon uiteindelik verstaan wat hy beskryf het. Wanneer ’n mens die onskuld en dankbaarheid in hul oë sien, sien jy nie meer

raak hoe hulle lyk nie.

Party van hulle het tot in daardie stadium nog nooit wit mense gesien nie. Een van hulle het aan my arm gevryf om te kyk of die wit sal afkom. Dit was vir my ongelooflik lekker om die kleintjies op te tel, al het my wit vel hulle partykeer bang gemaak. Dit was so ironies. Vroeër jare het ek meegedoen aan die rassistiese benadering dat dit onaanvaarbaar was om aan ’n swart mens te raak omdat ons so bang was vir hulle. Party van die kinders was bang vir my en die wit lyfwagte. Ons moes vir hulle soos wesens uit die buitenste ruim gelyk het. Meer as een keer het ’n kind op my heup bly sit, dalk omdat hy nuuskierig was om te sien of ek later na ’n ander planeet toe sou vertrek.

Wanneer jy ’n dag soos Kersfees in so ’n armoedige omgewing deurbring, is jy waarlik dankbaar vir jou voorregte, en ’n gebeurtenis soos dié gee nuwe betekenis aan Kersdag. Dit was die eerste Kersfees wat ek sonder my ouers deurgebring het, sonder geskenke, en sonder om te wonder wie vir my wat gaan gee. My fokus het verskuif na wat ek kan gee en doen, en dit is soveel meer vervullend en betekenisvol. Ná die kinderpartytjie het ons middagete saam met Madiba geniet, en later het van sy familielede en ouer stamlede kom besoek aflê.

Die jaar daarna het ons besef ons kon nie net vir tweeduisend kinders voorberei nie. Ons het donasies vir vyfduisend van elke artikel gevra. Dié keer het die president alles aan my oorgelaat. Ek het sy raad oor sekere aspekte van die reëlings gevra, maar teen dié tyd het almal van die president se projek geweet en dit was nie moeilik om donasies te werf nie. Ons het weer ’n paar dae voor Kersfees begin voorberei, maar dié keer vir vyfduisend. Dit was nog steeds te min. Die volgende jaar was dit tienduisend, en uiteindelik het ons by twintigduisend getrek. Om twintigduisend pakkies op te maak, is nie ’n grap nie. Maar ’n klompie kleinkinders en kinders van die gebied asook van die veiligheidspersoneel het gehelp, en op een of ander manier het ons dit baas geraak. In die laaste jaar van ons private partytjie het dit ons twee weke, dag en nag, geneem om betyds klaar te wees. En al wat ek moes sê voor mense ingestem het om te help, was: ‘Onthou, vir party van hierdie kinders is dit die enigste geleentheid in die hele jaar om ’n ordentlike bord kos en ’n geskenkie te kry … dis hul enigste Kersgeskenk.’ Ek het die president se woorde

net so herhaal. Dis nie asof die kinders van die dorpie aan veel meer gewoond was nie, maar dit het die lyfwagte oorreed om te help.

In die laaste jaar het Oprah Winfrey gevra of sy kon help, ná ons besoek aan Chicago waar die president haar vertel het wat ons op Kersdag in Qunu doen. Ek dink hulle het vir vyf-en-twintigduisend kinders in Qunu voorsiening gemaak, en sy het nog vyf-en-twintigduisend geskenke in plattelandse skole reg oor Suid-Afrika versprei. Maar sy het dit op groot skaal gedoen. Kinders het skoolklere en skryfbehoeftes gekry saam met die lekkernye en ’n bord gesonde kos. Ons het die grootte van die skare onderskat, en hoe goed Oprah en die president se teenwoordigheid vooraf geadverteer is, en ons moes ’n stormloop afweer. Daar was ma’s wat honderde kilometers ver gereis het om hul kinders te bring, van so ver as die Vrystaat. Kinders is met busse afgelaai en daar was nie genoeg veiligheidspersoneel nie. Nadat daar byna ’n tragedie was, het ons toe besluit om die Kerspartytjie voortaan aan die Nelson Mandela-kinderfonds oor te laat en dat dit in verskillende streke in die land aangebied sou word.

Teen die einde van die jaar het die president ook besoeke aan kleuterskole in Johannesburg en Kaapstad begin bring. Hy was gek na interaksie met kinders. Die eerste jaar het hy die reëlings weer eens aan Rochelle oorgelaat. Nadat sy na die VSA vertrek het, het ek oorgeneem. Die president het vir my belangrike lesse geleer oor maniere waarop ’n mens skenkings en ondersteuning vir mense in desperate omstandighede kan reël indien jy nie self vir alles kon betaal nie. In ruil vir die borge se skenkings van lekkernye en geskenke sou hy ’n hele dag saam met hulle deurbring terwyl die goed uitgedeel word. Hulle sou ook blootstelling kry op televisie en in koerante. Die plan was eenvoudig en het soos ’n bom gewerk. Ons sou die media altyd uitnooi om die dag se gebeure met ons te deel en daaroor verslag te doen. Wanneer ons kleuterskole besoek het, het die media ook ’n kans gekry om ’n dag saam met die land se geliefde president deur te bring, en die borge het die blootstellings gekry wat aan hulle beloof is. Wanneer die dag se gebeure verby was, is die media en die borge vir middagete na ons kantoor genooi, of soms na ’n hotel daar naby, waar die president hulle bedank het vir hul ondersteuning. Die nuus het vinnig versprei en mense sou vir jare daarna ywerig meedoen.

Daar was ’n paar geleenthede waar politici probeer het om in te meng met die reëlings of om die geleentheid te kaap. Die president sou dit dan baie duidelik stel dat dit nie aan een enkele politieke party behoort nie en dat die onderwysers en ouers van hierdie kinders geregtig was op hul eie politieke opinies, en dat dit gerespekteer moes word. Ek moes altyd seker maak dat die skole wat ons besoek die land se demografie verteenwoordig. Indien ons vyf skole besoek, sou twee swart skole wees, een Indiër, een wit en een bruin skool. Soos skole meer geïntegreerd geraak het ná die transformasie, het dit effens moeiliker geraak en ek moes hulle vooraf besoek om te sien of hulle geskik sou wees. Ons moes ook seker maak dat dit nie lyk of skole wat deur Xhosas oorheers word bevoordeel word nie. Xhosa is die etniese groep waarin die president gebore is. Hy was uiters sensitief oor hierdie tipe sake en dit het ’n bloudruk in my gedagtes gevorm dat hy, elke keer as hy vir een groep iets doen, hy dit moes opvolg met iets soortgelyks vir ’n ander groep. Hy wou nooit gehad het dit moet lyk asof hy een groep bo ’n ander verkies of dat hy bevooroordeeld teenoor ’n sekere groep was nie. Dit was asof hy vasbeslote was om aan die voorpunt van nasiebou te staan, maak nie saak hoe hard mense probeer het om ’n etiket van ’n sekere groep, ras, godsdiens, klas of wat ook al aan hom te hang nie.

Ek het geen idee hoekom ek die verantwoordelikheid gegee is vir die Kerspartytjies en die besoeke aan kleuterskole nie, en hoekom hy dit ook nie van die begin af aan die kinderfonds oorhandig het wat hy gestig het voor ek by sy kantoor aangesluit het nie. Hoewel albei take vir my groot emosionele voordele gebied het en Kersfees vir my ’n nuwe betekenis gekry het, moet ek sê ek het klaar genoeg werksdruk en uitdagings gehad. Ek was uiteindelik baie bly toe die kinderfonds oorgeneem het.

In dieselfde tyd het die president ’n bouprojek begin vir skole en klinieke. Hy het dit reggekry om maatskappye, plaaslik en internasionaal, te oorreed om skole en klinieke in die mees afgesonderde Suid-Afrikaanse plattelandse gebiede te bou. Meer as honderd skole en meer as vyftig klinieke is op hierdie manier gebou. President Mandela was nooit ’n baie goeie administrateur nie, maar sy mikpunte en sy strategie was foutloos.

In die begin het die regering nie veel aandag gegee aan hierdie nuwe strukture wat opgerig is nie. Die proses was eenvoudig. Die president sou met ’n sekere hoofman praat, iemand wat tradisioneel die leiding in ’n gemeenskap neem. Die hoofman sou smeek vir ’n skool. Die president sou in die koerant kyk watter maatskappye besig was om buitengewoon goed te vaar, en dan die bedryfshoof of die eienaar van die maatskappy vir ontbyt of middagete nooi. Wie sou nee sê vir ’n ete saam met die president? Teen die einde van die projek het sakelui mekaar begin terg en gesê wanneer die president jou nooi vir ontbyt, kan dit dalk die duurste ontbyt van jou hele lewe wees. Net by twee geleenthede het maatskappye beloof om strukture te bou en nie by hul beloftes gehou nie. Dit was onmoontlik vir die regering om dienste te verskaf teen die pas wat die publiek gedink het hy sou. Die president het alles gedoen wat hy kon om die proses te versnel deur die private sektor hierby te betrek. Opvoeding en gesondheidsorg was sy prioriteite. Hy het altyd gesê opvoeding is die enigste wapen waarmee ’n mens armoede kan beveg.

Eers sou hy reël dat ’n verteenwoordiger van die maatskappy saam met ons na hierdie plattelandse gebiede vlieg sodat ons hom kan wys waar die skool of kliniek gebou moes word en om hulle aan gemeenskapsleiers voor te stel wat na die projek sou omsien. Ons het baie ure op reis na hierdie gebiede deurgebring. Nadat die projek voltooi is, sou ons saam met die sakeman teruggaan na die gebied en die president sou die skool of die kliniek persoonlik open.

In ’n gevorderde stadium van die projek, teen die tyd dat die regering ’n nuwe leier sou kry in 1999, het ons besef dat baie van hierdie strukture eenvoudig toegelaat is om te vergaan. Dit was die fout van die regering wat nie die onderwysers, toerusting, verpleeggeriewe en infrastruktuur bygedra het om hierdie inisiatief te laat werk nie. Hoewel ’n mens kan aanvaar dat die uitdagings groot was, is dit ’n groot jammerte dat daar geen samewerking van hulle kant af was om te verseker dat die skole en klinieke doeltreffend aangewend kon word nie. Die president moes self ’n deel van die skuld dra, aangesien hy te maklik aan versoeke van tradisionele leiers toegegee het. Hy het nie altyd deeglik nagevors of die skole en klinieke op die regte plekke beplan is nie. Jare later het die Nelson Mandela Instituut vir Opvoeding en Landelike Ontwikkeling in

samewerking met die Universiteit van Fort Hare in die Oos-Kaap steun aan hierdie skole gebied.

Dit is ongelukkig so dat die onderwysstelsel in Suid-Afrika, en veral op die platteland, sy leerlinge in die steek laat. Dit is nog steeds een van Suid-Afrika se grootste uitdagings: die onderwys van ons kinders. Onderwys bly een van die swaksbetaalde professionele beroepe in die land. Onderwysers kan dit eenvoudig nie bekostig om hul gesinne op die platteland te onderhou nie, en die swak infrastruktuur in die gebiede voorsien die onderwysers nie met die regte toerusting en handboeke om hul werk doeltreffend te verrig nie. Omdat party van hierdie skole so verafgeleë is, ontvang hulle feitlik geen hulp van die department van nasionale onderwys nie, en net so is dit bitter moeilik vir die departement om dissipline uit te oefen.

Die media is saamgenooi na elke besoek aan ’n plattelandse skool of kliniek wat gebou is. Die dekking wat media-instansies vir hul bydrae gekry het tydens spitstyd op televisie saam met die president was beslis die geld werd wat hulle bestee het. Baie van die maatskappye sit hul steun vir die projek voort en deel in die passie vir die onderwys van ons kinders.

In 1998 is president Bill Clinton deur die grootste uitdaging van sy politieke loopbaan in die gesig gestaar. Die skandaal oor sy verhouding met Monica Lewinsky het sy politieke loopbaan bedreig en het wêreldwyd opslae gemaak. Te midde van die skandaal sou hy ’n staatsbesoek aan Suid-Afrika bring. Wanneer ’n mens in die moeilikheid is, was daar geen beter vriend as Nelson Mandela nie. Die president het niks wat gebeur het goedgepraat nie, maar hy het tog ’n manier gehad om die menslike kant van sake in perspektief te stel. Hy gaan jou nie van jou skuldgevoel ontslae laat raak nie, maar hy sal jou veilig laat voel en saggies oortuig om verantwoordelikheid te aanvaar sonder om verneder te voel. Deur hierdie aanslag oor ’n lang tyd waar te neem, het ek besef hoe my denke verander het, en hoe ek na dinge gekyk het waaroor ek in die verlede altyd sterk menings uitgespreek het. President Mandela was nooit bang om sy eie foute te erken nie en het amper uit sy pad gegaan om verskoning te vra en dan aan te beweeg. Wanneer mense oordadige eer aan hom betoon het, het hy altyd gesê ’n heilige is ’n sondaar wat aanhou probeer.

Dit beteken nie hy het enigiets goedgepraat wat sonder integriteit

en eerlikheid was nie, maar hy het geglo dat die meeste mense ’n reguit pad wil loop en dat hulle soms struikel, soos alle mense maar maak. Wat vir hom belangrik was en duidelik vir my geword het, is dat hy dié wat foute gemaak, sonde gepleeg of gestruikel het, nooit laat voel het hulle word afgesny nie. Hy was eerlik oor hul foute en het vir hulle gesê dat hy hul menslikheid aanvaar en erken en dat die bereidwilligheid om jou foute te erken baie belangrik was as jy jouself wou vergewe en aanbeweeg. President Mandela het president Clinton met ope arms ontvang en dit duidelik gemaak dat hy bewus was van die persoonlike probleme waarmee hy opgesaal was, maar hy het hom ook laat verstaan dat hy respek vir hom gehad het en geloof in sy vermoë om te lei.

Op 22 Maart 1998 was daar ’n banket ter ere van president Clinton se besoek aan Suid-Afrika. Teen daardie tyd het ons sekretaresses almal beurte gemaak om geleenthede by te woon om vir president Mandela te ondersteun. Ek was verbaas toe ek gevra is om by die staatsbanket te werk op Vergelegen, ’n plaas in die bekende Kaapse wynstreek. Dit was ’n uitsonderlik geskiedkundige gebeurtenis en almal wou dit daardie aand bywoon. Vergelegen is ’n driekwartier per motor van Genadendal. Om die verkeer te vermy en tyd te bespaar het die veiligheidspersoneel besluit dit sou beter wees vir ons om per helikopter daarheen te vlieg.

Ek was nog nooit goed met optof nie. En so is dit vandag nog. Ek voel op my gemaklikste met my gunsteling-jeans, intrapskoene en ’n hemp of T-hemp. Maar ek het verstaan dat ek hard sou moes probeer vir hierdie banket. Dit was immers ’n staatsgeleentheid wat die magtigste land in die wêreld ingesluit het. Ek het ’n lang, swart rok hiervoor laat maak, niks buitensporig nie, en besluit op skoene met ’n effense hak, nie te hoog nie aangesien ons gewoonlik die hele aand moes staan.

Ritte in militêre helikopters, wat uiteraard vir die vervoer van soldate ontwerp is, was maar rof. Wanneer ons in een gevlieg het, het ek my altyd verbeel ons is op pad na ’n skermutseling. Die Oryx word as een van die beste helikopters ter wêreld beskou. Dit is ’n stewige militêre masjien met plek vir sestien passasiers in volle mondering. Teen dié tyd het ek die vlugte in die helikopters vreeslik geniet. Ek het gehou van die klank, maar ook wanneer die vlieëniers draaie gegooi

het. Ek was altyd ’n liefhebber van ’n klein bietjie avontuur.

Ons het by Vergelegen geland en die staaltrappies waarmee ’n mens uitklim is uitgehaal en gemonteer die oomblik toe die rotorlem stop. Volgens protokol was die president altyd die laaste een wat ’n vliegtuig bestyg en die eerste wat afklim. Wanneer mevrou Machel saam met ons was, of die president ’n ander amptelike metgesel gehad het, het daardie persoon gevolg, en is dan gevolg deur enigeen wat eerste by die deur kan uitkom. Die veiligheidspersoneel het gewoonlik uit ’n helikopter gespring, want dit was nie baie hoog van die grond af nie. Hierdie keer het die president uitgeklim en mevrou Machel het gevolg. Terwyl die president besig was om by die trappies af te klim, het hy met my begin praat en my ’n vraag gevra die oomblik toe hy sy voete op die grond sit. Die vraag het iets te make gehad met die program of met die tyd van president Clinton se aankoms. Hy was net besig om om te draai om oogkontak met my te maak en te hoor wat ek sê, toe ek teen die trappies afgevlieg kom en op albei my knieë agter hom beland. Wat gebeur het, was dat my lang rok aan die trappiereëlings vasgehaak het en my verhinder het om af te klim. Almal het gelag, behalwe die president en mevrou Machel. Dit was duidelik die snaaksste ding wat mense nog gesien het. Dis een ding om te val en ’n ander ding om dit in ’n aandgewaad te doen, maar dis beslis iets om te aanskou wanneer dit uit ’n helikopter gebeur. Die president het steeds oogkontak met my probeer maak, maar hy vind my toe op die grond agter hom. ‘Help haar op, help haar op!’ het hy beveel. Hy was regtig besorg oor my. ‘Het jou rok skade gekry?’ het hy gevra. Ek het mooi gekyk, maar niks fout gesien nie.

Mense sukkel soms om hulle lag te hou na so ’n voorval. Aangesien president Clinton ook per helikopter sou arriveer, was daar oral lede van die geheime diens. Hulle het in bosse weggekruip en dit het gelyk of daar skielik ’n sterk wind oor Vergelegen waai soos dié wat in die bosse geskuil het oor my petalje lag. Die president is die enigste een wat gelyk het of hy omgee oor my welstand. Vir die res van die mense was dit net ’n prettige insident en hulle kon feitlik nie bedaar nie. Ek het my nie juis van stryk laat bring nie en het na die huis gestap waar ons op president Clinton sou wag.

President Mandela is ’n sitplek aangewys in die huis langs die markiestent waar die banket sou plaasvind. Hy sou daar vir president

Clinton inwag en hulle sou die banket tegelykertyd betree. Ek het buite gebly en inligting oor president Clinton se verwagte aankomstyd probeer bekom om aan president Mandela oor te dra. Vergelegen is ’n private wynplaas en die huis is pragtig in die ou Kaaps-Hollandse styl versier. Terwyl ek buite gewag het, het ek een van Suid-Afrika se voorste komediante, Pieter-Dirk Uys, ontmoet. Hy was besig om gereed te maak vir sy vertoning by die banket en hy het my aandag afgelei van die gebeure vroeër. Die president was gek na Uys se optredes. Uys het nooit teruggehou in sy komiese nabootsings van Suid-Afrikaanse politici nie. Toe ek terug by die huis instap waar die president sit en wag, het ek nie gesien daar is ’n baksteen voor die deur om te keer dat die wind dit toewaai nie. Ek het daaroor gestruikel. Hierdie keer het ek nie geval nie, maar myself baie vinniger voor die president bevind as wat ek verwag het. Hy het net gesê: ‘Ag nee, darling, kry eerder ’n stoel en kom sit.’ Ek was verleë en duidelik baie meer senuweeagtig as gewoonlik toe ek later die aand sy toespraak aan hom oorhandig by die podium. Ek het gebid terwyl ek teen die trappies opstap dat die noodlot my nie weer sou tref nie. Dit het nie en die res van die aand het sonder enige drama verloop.

Teen daardie tyd het die president en mevrou Machel dikwels op my gesteun. Dit was nie maklik om hul dagboeke te laat klop nie. Ons moes tyd vind vir hulle om saam te wees en dit was ’n uitdaging. Mevrou Machel het steeds in Mosambiek en op ander plekke in die wêreld gewerk, hoofsaaklik om kinderregte te bevorder, en sy was gereeld op reis. Ek was soms in die moeilikheid omdat ek nie tyd kon vind om vir haar en die president privaatheid te verseker nie. Dit was ’n onbegonne taak. Hulle albei het teen ’n stywe pas gewerk, altyd in ’n wedloop teen tyd. Die president sou honderd goedjies in een week gedoen wou hê en hy het alles ingepas. Mevrou Machel se program was net so vol. Soms het hy tot sekere goed ingestem, maar dan moes hy sy dagboek op kort kennisgewing heeltemal verander. Nie as gevolg van mevrou Machel nie, maar omdat hy soms op die laaste oomblik anders besluit het. Ons het dinge begin kanselleer en dan was ons altyd bang dat mense sou raai of vermoed dat gesondheidsprobleme die rede daarvoor is.

Die rand se waarde sou dadelik val wanneer die president soveel as ’n gewone verkoue opgedoen het. Die wêreld het gevrees dat Suid-

Afrika in chaos sou verval en dalk in vlamme sou opgaan. Die president was die simbool van stabiliteit vir alle Suid-Afrikaners, swart en wit, en die wêreld het dit geweet. Hy kon dus nie eens sê hy voel olik wanneer hy op die laaste nippertjie iets moes kanselleer nie. Tensy dit natuurlik die absolute waarheid was. In die publiek se oë was hy amper besig om in ’n superwese te verander. Selfs as hy maar net wou rus, het stories oor sy gesondheid die ronde begin doen.

Vroeg in 1998 was die president veronderstel om ’n geldinsameling vir die Nelson Mandela-kinderfonds te behartig. Hy het die kinderfonds in 1995 gestig om kinders, en veral weeskinders wat deur die vigskrisis geraak is, te help. Hy het die geld wat hy met die Nobelprys gewen het geskenk om die fonds in die lewe te roep en ook elke jaar ’n derde van sy salaris aan die fonds geskenk. Verder het hy projekte gelei om geld in te samel. By hierdie spesifieke geleentheid moes hy gasheer wees vir internasionale glansmense en modelle en daarna sou hulle ’n reis onderneem op die Bloutrein, wat kort tevore opgeknap is. Daarna het ’n seereis op die Queen Elizabeth II op hom gewag. Mense kon teen ’n fooi van duisende dollars saam met hom en mevrou Machel reis. En alle winste is aan die kinderfonds geskenk. Al die plekke vir dié reis was uitverkoop.

Dit was ook in hierdie tyd dat president Charles Taylor van Liberië die betwiste diamante aan Naomi Campbell oorhandig het. Naomi was reg van die begin af ’n ondersteuner van die kinderfonds en een van die eerste internasionale skenkers.

Tydens Taylor se verhoor by die Internasionale Strafhof, waar gebeure om die geldinsameling bespreek is, het die volgorde waarin dinge gebeur het my laat wonder. Niemand het enige van die Suid-Afrikaanse veiligheidsbeamptes gevra wie die lyfwagte was wat aan Naomi se deur in die presidensiële gastehuis geklop en die sakkie klippies aan haar oorhandig het nie. As dit die Suid-Afrikaanse lyfwagte was, sou hulle in die sakkie gekyk het voordat hulle dit aan haar oorhandig het. Nie eens ’n president mag ’n geskenk op amptelike gebied oorhandig sonder dat dit oopgemaak en weer toegemaak word nie. As enigiemand die veiligheidsbeamptes gevra het hoeveel klippies in die sak was, sou hulle kon sê hoeveel daar was. En daar behoort ook ’n rekord te bestaan oor wie die huis daardie nag binnegegaan het. Suid-Afrikaanse polisiemanne word verplig om te

alle tye ’n sakboekie by hulle te dra. Daarin skryf hul elke dag presies wat hulle doen en lewer verslag oor elke minuut, ingeval hierdie inligting ooit van hulle vereis sou word. Ek twyfel of die Suid-Afrikaanse polisie twee Liberiese lyfwagte alleen in die presidensiële gastehuis sou toelaat, en die antwoorde is dus iewers op rekord in Suid-Afrika. Ons het niks van die geskenk geweet nie, maar Naomi het gesê sy het die sakkie diamante aan die uitvoerende hoof van die kinderfonds gegee, wat wel later vrygespreek is op aanklag van die besit van ongeslypte diamante.

Ons het aan boord van die Queen Elizabeth II gegaan. Dit was ’n wonderlike ervaring, hoewel die toer duidelik vir ’n ouer mark bedoel is. Baie luuks en ouderwets. Mense het elke aand opgetof vir aandete, maar vir my het dit gelyk asof hulle op pad was kerk toe. Daar was geen partytjies vir jong mense nie, maar eerder danse in die balsaal. Dit was te oulik om die oumense te sien dans, en nog so verlief. Die president en mevrou Machel het nie gaan dans nie, maar hulle het dit geniet op die Queen Elizabeth II. Hulle het net ’n bekendstelling en ete op die skip bygewoon en die res van die tyd het hulle uiteindelik ’n bietjie privaat tyd en gehaltetyd saam gehad, weg van die druk van die vasteland.

Ná die reis op die die Queen Elizabeth II het ek vir die tweede keer in vier jaar siek geword. Ek kon eenvoudig net nie meer die pas volhou nie. Die president is deur baie faktore aangedryf, en een daarvan was dat sy uittrede minder as ’n jaar in die toekoms gelê het. Hy wou soveel as moontlik doen om die veranderings mee te bring waarna hy gestreef het. Die dokters het gesê my ongesteldheid was ’n herhaling van die hartspierinfeksie wat ek opgedoen het ná ons staatsbesoek aan Japan in 1995, en dat ek eenvoudig oormoeg was. Ek is vir die volgende vier weke op siekteverlof geplaas en ná ’n week het ek ’n oproep van die lyfwagte ontvang wat gesê het die president wil my by my huis in Akasiapark besoek. Ek het nie gedink dis gepas vir ’n president om my in my eenvoudige eenslaapkamerhuisie te besoek nie en het hom gebel om hom te probeer oortuig dat dit goed gaan met my en dat ek spoedig weer vir werk sal aanmeld. Dit was nie nodig vir hom om my te besoek nie. Maar hy het daarop aangedring en kort daarna het hy daar opgedaag met die mooiste mandjie blomme wat ek nog ooit ontvang het.

Terwyl hy by my was en my sterkte en ’n spoedige herstel toegewens het, het hy heel onskuldig gesê: ‘Jy weet natuurlik net swak mense word siek.’ Ek het ’n bietjie meer simpatie verwag. Hy het sy hele lewe lank geglo ’n mens is in beheer van jou eie liggaam en dat jou brein net so ’n groot rol speel om jou gesond te maak soos enige medisyne. ’n Mens moes ook nog vasbeslote wees om gesond te word.

Ongeag hoe moeilik dinge soms was, hoeveel druk daar op my was en hoe moeg ek was, het sy gesig en sy glimlag die kamer laat ophelder. Dit was altyd die hoogtepunt van my dag. Later kon ek nie help om te glimlag wanneer ek hom sien nie. Wanneer ’n mens na aan iemand werk, begin jy onwillekeurig daardie persoon se emosies en gemoedstoestand lees. En tog, selfs in die moeilikste tye het daardie glimlag my nooit verlaat nie. Dit is in my hart opgesluit.

So het ek teen ’n onophoudelike pas bly werk, al wou stres en moegheid my soms oorweldig. Een keer het Madiba vir my ’n artikel voorgelees uit ’n koerant oor ’n studie van mense wat ekstra gewig om hul heupe en boude saamdra, en dat daar bevind is dat hulle stres beter hanteer. Die eerste keer toe hy dit lees, het ek sy bedoeling raakgesien en gesê: ‘U sien, Khulu, dis hoekom ek nog steeds al die stres kan hanteer. Dis danksy my groot heupe en boude.’ Hy het gelag en die artikel ’n tweede keer vir my gelees. Ek het nie gedink dis snaaks nie. Hy was besig om my te terg en ek kon hom nie keer nie.

Hy het altyd mense se gewig en gesondheid raakgesien. Hy sou soms vir ’n vrou vra of sy swanger is nadat sy net ’n paar kilogram opgetel het. Soms sou hy ’n private gesprek met ’n besoeker aanvra en hulle dan aanspreek oor hul gewig. Ek het opgehou tel hoeveel kere hy na iemand se groot maag gewys en gesê het: ‘Jy sal daai moet afskud.’ Party mense voel seergemaak as iemand oor hul gewig praat, en dis ’n groot verleentheid wanneer Nelson Mandela vir jou sê jy moet gewig verloor. Dit beteken jy moet minder eet. Ons het probeer om hierdie gesprekke ten alle koste te vermy. Wanneer hy gesê het hy wil private gesprekke met mense hieroor hê, sou ons hom probeer oortuig dat hy dit liewer moet los. Hy sou lag en dit baie vreemd en snaaks vind dat ons sou probeer om mense teen sy woorde te beskerm. En dan was daar mense wat aangedring het op ’n private gesprek met hom, omdat hulle gedink het hy gaan miskien vertroulike inligting aan hulle verklap. Later sou hulle uitstap en beswaard voel.

Eenkeer het ek sy aankoms by ’n openbare gebeurtenis ingewag. Hy wou weet of ek lank reeds vir hom wag. ‘Ja,’ het ek geantwoord. En hy het hardop gesê hy kon dit sien want ek lyk honger. Ek was nie. Hy was altyd besorg oor my veiligheid en wou weet of ek geëet het of nie.

In ’n stadium was ek op dieet en het nee gesê vir die kos wat my aangebied is. Ek het eerder gehou by my slaai, toe sê hy ek eet nie genoeg nie. Ek het openlik met hom gepraat en vir hom gesê ek probeer gewig afskud. Hy het toe gesê my gewig maak nie saak nie, want ek beweeg vinnig. Hy het bedoel hoewel ek oorgewig was, het dit nie die pas geraak waarteen ek kon stap of beweeg nie. Hy het so ’n snaakse manier gehad om met kos en liggaamsgewig om te gaan. As ek nie geëet het nie, het hy my daaroor aangespreek en gesê ek moet meer eet. Maar wanneer iemand ’n tweede porsie skep, sou hy afkeurend na die bord kyk. Ek was nog altyd sensitief oor my gewig, maar om die een of ander rede nie wanneer ek by hom was nie. Wanneer ek oor my gewig gekla het, het hy vriendelik gesê: ‘Maar jy het waardigheid.’

In Junie daardie jaar het die president middagete by Mhlamba Ndlopfu genuttig saam met die bekende aktivis Wolfie Kodesh. Die president het vir my gesê hy het by meneer Kodesh gebly voordat hy opgesluit is en ek was baie beïndruk toe ek gehoor het meneer Kodesh het Madiba in 1961 in sy woonstel in Johannesburg versteek. Die president het destyds graag in die oggende geoefen en hy sou vir tien of twintig minute per dag op een plek in meneer Kodesh se woonstel staan en draf. Ondanks die warmte wat ek tussen die twee van hulle bespeur het na hul reünie, moes ek wonder hoe dit voel as iemand vyfuur die oggend in jou woonstel op een plek staan en draf. Hul verdraagsaamheid teenoor mekaar het van die vryheidsvegters baie spesiale mense gemaak. Ek het hul geduld en vasberadenheid bewonder.

Ek het eenkeer die erns waarmee die president geoefen het vroeg een oggend in ’n hotelkamer aanskou. Ek moes my inhou of ek sou skreeu: ‘Khulu, jy gaan jouself seermaak!’ Hy was lank en skraal, maar jy sou sy krag onderskat totdat jy hom sien oefen. Hy het regtig gelyk soos ’n bokser wat gereed maak vir ’n geveg en hy het elke beweging met oortuiging en vasberadenheid uitgevoer. Wanneer ’n mens hom sou vra met watter oefening hy besig was, het hy vrylik raad

aangebied en meer as een keer terwyl ons oorsee op reis was moes ek 'n medisynebal kry waarop hy kon rol. Hy het gesê ek moet dit probeer, dit maak 'n mens se maag plat. Soms het sy oefenroetine regtig gelyk of dit aan waansin grens. Soveel so dat Rory Steyn, sy lyfwag, en ek dit histeries snaaks gevind het. Ons moes ons giggels maar inhou terwyl Madiba so woes oefen in 'n luukse hotel iewers. Ek het dalk nie al die toeristegoed aangevang in stede oor die wêreld heen nie, maar ek weet waar die hotelle met die beste kamerdiens is, die beste spyskaarte en waar om medisyneballe in die hande te kry.

Teen dié tyd was Virginia Engel die hoofsekretaresse in ons kantoor nadat Mary weg is. Die president het nog steeds my selfoonnommer uit sy kop geken en eenvoudig aangehou om my te bel vir elke liewe dingetjie, wat dit soms vir my moeilik gemaak het omdat ek sy oproepe aan Virginia moes rapporteer. Hy sou my saans bel om vir my te sê watter medisyne hy die volgende dag afgelewer wil hê, of soms sou hy my bel om my aan iets te herinner wat die volgende dag moes gebeur. Dit voel nooit lekker om ondermyn te word nie en hoewel ek werklik toegewyd was aan my werk en gek was oor die president, is ek seker ander mense het ondermyn gevoel deur dit wat gebeur het.

In daardie jare het ek probeer om so ver as moontlik van hom weg te bly. Ek het geglo hoe nader 'n mens aan die vuur staan, hoe makliker kan jy brand. Ek wou myself nie op hom afdwing nie en het probeer om 'n gesonde afstand te bewerkstellig en situasies te vermy waar hy deur my teenwoordigheid ingekeer sou voel. Later jare het dit moeiliker begin word, aangesien hy ongemaklik begin voel het wanneer ek nie naby hom was in 'n professionele situasie nie. Hy het geweet ek ken sy behoeftes deeglik en verstaan hoe hy dinge gedoen wil hê sodat hy dit met gemak kon hanteer. Hy wou presies weet wat op elke oomblik, byeenkoms of vergadering te wagte was. Voorts het hy vertrou dat ek orde sou handhaaf en seker sou maak dat dit wat hy nodig het, my enigste fokus sou wees. Want dit was ook so. Maar amptelik was ek in daardie stadium net een van die president se assistent- private sekretaresses.

Een van my ander kollegas was Morris Tshabalala, een van die gaafste mense wat ek nog ooit ontmoet het. Hy is saggeaard, baie vriendelik en het nederig voorgekom. In 'n sekere mate het die president van ou waardes gehou en nie maklik aanvaar dat 'n man 'n

sekretariële pos kon vul nie. Dis nie asof Morris enigiets verkeerd gedoen het nie, maar die president het anders gevoel oor vroue in sekere poste. Hy het nooit gediskrimineer nie, maar sy fokus sou altyd na vroue verskuif. Dieselfde met vlieëniers. Nadat die lugmag vroue begin oplei het, is vroulike loodse dikwels ingespan om sy vliegtuig of helikopter te vlieg. Hoewel hy nooit reguit gesê het dit pla hom nie, het ek geweet hy was altyd 'n klein bietjie meer op sy hoede wanneer daar 'n vrou in beheer van die stuurstang was. Jy kon dit in sy gesig bespeur. Ons sou hom altyd hieroor spot, maar hy het gesê die verandering van stereotipes was eenvoudig iets waaraan 'n mens gewoond moet raak. Hy was baie bewus van sy eie sienings in situasies soos hierdie maar het nooit sy besorgdheid openlik gewys nie. Dié wat hom geken het, kon agterkom dat hy nie heeltemal op sy gemak was nie. Maak nie saak hoe 'n sterk voorstander van gelykheid hy was nie, hy het erken dat hy harder moes werk om sy eie persepsies te verander.

Morris moes eenkeer 'n diplomatieke tameletjie waar die Spaanse en Portugese ambassades betrokke was, trotseer. Hy was veronderstel om 'n brief per hand by die Spaanse ambassade af te lewer met 'n boodskap dat Suid-Afrika Wes-Sahara in die toekoms as 'n onafhanklike land sou erken. Ongelukkig het hy dit per ongeluk by die Portugese ambassade afgelewer. Die ambassadeur het ons nie laat weet dat die brief by die verkeerde adres opgedaag het nie. Hy het dit oopgemaak en dae lank by hom gehou voordat die president agtergekom het die brief wat hy aan die Spaanse ambassade gerig het, het nooit by sy bestemming uitgekom nie. Morris het self agtergekom dat hy die brief by die verkeerde plek afgelewer het en hy het professor Gerwel gebel, wat die nuus aan die president oorgedra het. Die Spanjaarde was woedend.

Die fout het 'n diplomatieke insident veroorsaak en die president het die Portugese ambassadeur dadelik uit Suid-Afrika geskop omdat hy die brief vir homself gehou het en nie die foutiewe aflewering aangemeld het nie. Dit was oneties om daardie inligting te weerhou, aangesien dit so sensitief was op internasionale vlak. Dit kon tot 'n baie ernstige internasionale diplomatieke krisis gelei het. Die president het toe gevoel hy moet by sy eie kantoor ook optree om te wys dat hy ernstig en regverdig is. Morris is oorgeplaas, ironies

genoeg na die departement van buitelandse sake. Ek het by professor Gerwel en die president gepleit om Morris nog ’n kans te gee, maar die president het vasgeskop en gesê hy moes optree. En wanneer hy eers ’n besluit geneem het, sou nie eens ’n militêre inval hom tot ander insigte bring nie. Ek het ’n paar keer daarna met Morris gepraat en dit het gelyk of hy gelukkig is in sy nuwe pos, ondanks die pyn en verwarring wat sy vertrek by ons almal veroorsaak het.

Dit maak nie saak hoe ontstellend hierdie voorval vir ons was nie, dit was ook ’n duidelike voorbeeld van hoe die president as diplomaat gehandel het, selfs al was daar niks diplomaties omtrent die optrede nie. Na ’n paar dae het die publiek daarvan vergeet. Hy het vinnig opgetree in die openbaar en op ’n private vlak tot aksie oorgegaan en die saak was opgelos. Meer onlangs in Suid-Afrika het die teenoorgestelde gebeur. Daar is gevind dat vriende van ons huidige president, Jacob Zuma, toegelaat is om sonder die nodige toestemming op ’n militêre lugmagbasis in Pretoria te land. Die familie wie se vliegtuig daar geland het, het ’n oordadige troue by Sun City buite Pretoria bygewoon. Daar was internasionale, kommersiële en private lughawens in die gebied beskikbaar, maar hulle het op die militêre basis geland en is met amptelike polisievoertuie na die troue begelei. Vanuit politieke geledere is daar nie veel aan dié saak gedoen nie.

Soos die jaar aangestap het, het die president se reise toegeneem. Hy het hard gewerk om aan die wêreld te wys dit gaan goed met Suid-Afrika. So het ons toe na Burkino Faso gereis vir ’n vergadering van die Afrika-unie wat deur alle Afrika-staatshoofde bygewoon is. Die eerste paar jaar was dit vir my interessant om deel te wees van hierdie groot byeenkomste van staatshoofde van oor die hele wêreld. Maar dit word vinnig jou grootste nagmerrie omdat daar soveel tyd gemors word terwyl jy sit en wag sodat protokol waargeneem kan word.

Ons verblyfplek in Burkino Faso was nuut gebou. Maar daar is net aan die staatshoofde kos verskaf, al is die res van ons ook daar gehuisves. Ons moes maar na onsself omsien. Die vergaderings was gewoonlik chaoties en alles het ’n ewigheid gevat. Ander staatshoofde het meegeding om president Mandela privaat te spreek. Soms het hy ingestem; ander kere wou hy persoonlike vergaderings tot die minimum beperk. Daar is van presidente verwag om in alfabetiese

volgorde by die vergadering op te daag, volgens hul name of die name van hul lande, aangesien senioriteit altyd iets is waaroor hulle gestry het. Party staatshoofde is al vir ewig en ewig aan die bewind – aanvanklik danksy ’n vrye verkiesing, wat dan in ’n diktatuur ontaard. Om die een of ander rede het my pa vir my sakke vol biltong saamgegee. Dit het ons stapelvoedsel geword, saam met vars brood wat ons by ’n informele straatstalletjie gekoop het. Burkino Faso is ’n voormalige Franse kolonie en die Franse invloed is nog duidelik te sien. Ons het warm Franse broodjies gekoop en biltong as vulsel gebruik, en ek en die veiligheidsmense het vir twee en ’n half dae op daardie ingesmokkelde gedroogde vleis oorleef.

Ons afvaardiging was die kleinste in vergelyking met ander lande s’n. Gewoonlik het dit bestaan uit ’n sekretaresse, ’n dokter, twee lyfwagte, tussen drie en vyf ander sekuriteitsmense wat vooruit gestuur is, en dan op die allermeeste twee mense van protokol – een van die presidensie en een van buitelandse sake. Die ministers het bygekom wanneer hulle vir bilaterale samesprekings nodig was. Daar was nooit meer as vyftien tot twintig mense in ons afvaardiging nie. Die Amerikaanse afvaardiging was die grootste, met meer as tweehonderd mense. Maar hulle het die geld daarvoor gehad. Ons president het deur sy optrede bewys dat hy belangriker prioriteite het en dat hy nie sou toelaat dat geld gemors word nie. ’n Mens waardeer hierdie houding, maar dit het ook tot gevolg gehad dat ons almal meer as een rol moes vervul.

As gevolg van die president se gevorderde ouderdom – hy was negeen-sewentig teen daardie tyd – het hy ook van kontinuïteit gehou en hy wou nie graag onbekende gesigte om hom hê nie. Wanneer ’n nuwe personeellid deel van die afvaardiging was, sou hy agter geslote deure vra: ‘Wie is daardie persoon? Wat doen hy of sy?’ En ’n mens het geweet hy dink ook na oor kostes en produktiwiteit. Hy het gereeld gevra wat die onkostes beloop en of ons plaaslik of oorsee moes reis. Hoeveel kos die hotel waar julle tuisgaan en wie betaal daarvoor? Wat ook al jou antwoord was, jy het geweet hy is besorg oor uitgawes.

Na die besoek aan Burkina Faso is ons na die Verenigde Koninkryk, waar ons in ’n huis op die platteland gebly het wat aan die Roodefamilie behoort. Hulle het ’n baie groot voedselmaatskappy in Suid-Afrika besit. Ek was gek oor die Engelse platteland.

Ons het ’n hoflikheidsbesoek aan koningin Elizabeth in Buckinghampaleis gebring en ek is getref deur die warm vriendskap tussen die president en die koningin. ‘Oh, Elizabeth,’ sou hy sê wanneer hy haar groet en sy sou antwoord: ‘Hello, Nelson’. As hondeliefhebber het ek dit interessant gevind dat die corgi’s se kosbakke by die kantingang na die paleis staan.

Na ’n paar dae op ampsbesoek aan Londen het ons na Wallis vertrek, en daarna na Italië vir ’n staatsbesoek. Ons het ook ’n staatsbesoek aan die Vatikaan gebring. Die president het ’n private gesprek met die pous gehad, en daarna is ons afvaardiging binnegeroep. Die president het altyd daarop aangedring om die hele afvaardiging aan ’n staatshoof voor te stel en die pous was geen uitsondering nie. Ons is elkeen individueel aan hom voorgestel en pous Johannes Paulus II, wat toe al reeds tenger was, het ons hande geskud, die seën oor ons uitgespreek en vir ons elkeen ’n bidsnoer gegee. Ek het geen idee gehad wat ’n bidsnoer was nie. Ek het gedink dis ’n Katolieke halsbandjie. Ek het my ma daardie aand gebel en gesê ek dink die pous kon die sonde in my oë sien toe hy na my kyk. Hoewel party van my kollegas net so gevoel het soos ek, het my ma gedink ek is laf.

Terwyl ons by ’n amptelike staatsete in Italië was, het een van die ministers aan ’n garnaal verstik. Hy het begin hoes en ’n skielike stilte het oor die tafel neergedaal toe hy van sy stoel af val. Gelukkig was president Mandela se dokter teenwoordig by al sy amptelike seremonies. Omdat ons met so ’n klein afvaardiging gereis het, het hy altyd daarop aangedring dat al sy eie personeellede ingesluit word. Ons dokter kon letterlik die minister se lewe langs die tafel red.

Later het die president ook die presidensiële vliegtuig se bemanning na bankette toe genooi, selfs al sou dit beteken dat hy dit van die staatshoof of regering self moes versoek. Hy het nooit sy personeel hanteer asof hulle gewone betaalde werknemers was nie.

Dit was ook op hierdie reis dat ek aan Yusuf Surtee voorgestel is. Surtee se pa was die president se kleremaker voor hy tronk toe is. Die Surtee-gesin se maatskappy het al die president se pakke klere en van sy beroemde gekleurde hemde gemaak. Yusuf het die Italianer Stefano Ricci, verteenwoordiger van die bekende Brioni-handelsmerk, gebring sodat hy aan die president voorgestel kon word. Net soos wat ek soos

’n tipiese Boeremeisie gelyk het, het Stefano soos ’n tipiese Italianer gelyk. Hy was joviaal, vol lewenslus en vrygewig. Hy sou altyd die allermooiste klere vir die president stuur en ’n mens kon die liefde en moeite sien in die keuse van elke uitrusting. Wanneer Stefano klere deur Yusuf aangestuur het, sou Yusuf se winkels elke keer aanpassings maak na die president se wense. Yusuf en Stefano het albei onberispelike smaak gehad.

Dit was tyd vir die president se tagtigste verjaardag. Vir die aand van 18 Julie 1998 is daar ’n enorme partytjie beplan deur die ANC en die Mandela-familie saam met Suzanne Weil, ’n sakevennoot van een van Madiba se dogters. Al die president se persoonlike personeel is uitgenooi na die glansgeleentheid by Gallagher Estate in Midrand, saam met die room van Suid-Afrika se sosiale landskap. Onder die internasionale gaste was Naomi Campbell, Michael Jackson, Quincy Jones en Stevie Wonder, om net enkeles te noem.

Vroeër daardie week het bespiegeling begin dat die president en mevrou Machel op sy verjaardag sou trou. Ek het daaroor nagedink en besluit dat dit nie waar kon wees nie. Niks buitengewoon het in die kantoor gebeur om my te laat glo dat daar waarheid in die gerugte was nie. Parks is keer op keer gevra: Gaan hulle op die agttiende trou? Hy het gesê hy weet nie, hy was nie seker nie, en toe het hy dit vaagweg begin ontken en uiteindelik het hy gesê daar gaan beslis geen troue wees nie. Ek het Josina, mevrou Machel se dogter, vroeër die week gebel om te vra of sy enigiets weet. Sy het nie, en ons moes maar net daarvan vergeet. Josina het in die president se amptelike woning in Kaapstad tuisgegaan tydens sy bewindsjare terwyl sy daar op universiteit was. Ons het dus baie tyd saam deurgebring en goeie vriende geword. Ek het vir haar gesê: ‘Zina, as jy vir my jok, weet jy ek sal jou moet doodmaak.’ Dit was ’n grap. Ons was almal opgewonde oor die verjaardag, maar ons het regtig nie geweet of daar ’n troue sou wees nie. Op Saterdag, 18 Julie, het ek wakker geword en in koerantopskrifte vasgekyk: HULLE GAAN TROU! Ek het net geglimlag. Ek is saam met ’n paar ander mense gevra om later in die dag by die Houghton-huis te werk. Ek het gedink hulle verwag familie vir die verjaardagpartytjie en sou dus ekstra hande nodig hê.

Ek en die president was gereeld op die foon. Hy het takies aan my opgelê en ek sou hom met boodskappe of vrae moes bel. Baie mense

was geïrriteerd omdat ons baie op die foon was. Hy het my stem geken en kon my maklik hoor, terwyl hy gesukkel het om te hoor wat party ander mense sê. So, op sy tagtigste verjaardag het ek besluit om hom vroeg die oggend te bel om hom geluk te wens. Ek sou nooit bel of pla tensy ek 'n baie goeie rede gehad het om iets werkverwant met hom te bespreek nie. Maar op daardie dag het ek gedink dis so 'n spesiale dag dat ek móés bel, al het ek geweet ek sou hom later die middag by sy huis sien.

Die president en mevrou Machel het die Vrydagnag in Mahlamba Ndlopfu deurgebring. Dis nie iets wat baie gebeur het nie, aangesien hulle verkies het om in Johannesburg oor te bly. Die huispersoneel het my na hom deurgeskakel en ek het gesê: 'Goeiemôre, Khulu,' en begin sing: 'Happy birthday …' Na die laaste noot het ek gesê: 'Ek hoop hierdie dag is die mooiste van u hele lewe.'

Ek kon hoor hy was geamuseerd en hy het geweet ek vis vir inligting. Hy het net gesê: 'Dankie, darling, dit sal beslis wees.' En toe het ek geweet dat hy daardie dag sou trou. Ek wou uit my vel spring. Ek kon nie my opgewondenheid beteuel nie, maar ek het nie 'n woord vir enigiemand gesê nie. Ek het die hele dag probeer uitwerk waar, wanneer en hoe. Toe onthou ek die president het ons 'n paar weke tevore gevra om 'n juwelier te bel om hom by Mahlamba Ndlopfu te kom sien. Toe die juwelier aankom, het hulle buitentoe gestap en onder 'n boom gaan sit vir hul gesprek. Ek het gedink dis iemand wat die president van vroeër ken en het geen aandag daaraan geskenk nie. Ek het vermoed hulle gaan by die amptelike banket trou, aangesien al hul vriende en familie daar sou wees, maar ek was te bang om te bespiegel.

Hulle het by die presidensiële gastehuis aangesit vir middagete, waar die familie reeds vergader was. Die personeel is nie genooi nie. Ons het aanbeweeg na die huis in Houghton nadat 'n paar van ons gevra is om die middag daar tee te bedien, en daar was dit duidelik dat die media hierdie storie nie deur hul vingers sou laat glip nie. Daar was oral mediaverteenwoordigers. Party verslaggewers het oor die muur probeer spring en ander het in bome in die bure se tuine geklim. Dit was 'n groot uitdaging vir die veiligheidsmense. Ons het binnetoe gegaan, waar dit amper stil en somber was. Ons het aan die agterkant van die huis gebly en koppies en ander teegerei reggesit. Die

president en mevrou Machel het kort daarna aangekom, gevolg deur ’n paar ander gaste. Hier wou ek nie my neus insteek nie en ek het so ver as moontlik weggebly, want toe het die nuus soos ’n veldbrand deur die huis versprei: Daar gaan binne die volgende paar minute ’n troue hier plaasvind.

Alles was eenvoudig en pragtig. Net ’n paar mense wat baie na aan hulle was, het die seremonie bygewoon: aartsbiskop Desmond Tutu, Thabo en Zanele Mbeki, prins Bandar Bin Sultan van Saoedi-Arabïe, Yusuf Surtee, George Bizos, Ahmed Kathrada en die Sisulu’s, om ’n paar te noem. In ware Madiba-styl is feitlik alle godsdiensgroepe in Suid-Afrika verteenwoordig. Hoewel die Metodiste-biskop Mvume Dandala hulle in die huwelik bevestig het, het talle ander godsdienste ’n rol gespeel. Dit was eerbiedig en stylvol. Ons het mevrou Machel alleen by die trappe sien afkom, grasieus, amper soos ’n mens haar naam sê: Graça. Die meeste van ons kon nie ons emosies in toom hou nie en daar waar ons uit ’n kamer langsaan geloer het, het ons trane afgevee. Dit was so mooi en die president het verdien om uiteindelik gelukkig te wees.

Die aand se feesvieringe was presies wat ’n mens van so ’n geleentheid sou verwag. Madiba het uiteindelik die verhoog betree om ’n paar woorde op sy verjaardag te sê, maar sy eerste woorde, wat met groot toejuiging begroet is, was: ‘Ek en my vrou.’ Die hele land het saam feesgevier.

Dit was ’n wonderlike, feestelike aand. Ek was elke nou en dan lus om myself te knyp. Kon dit alles waar wees? Ek het nooit gedroom dat ek by die tagtigste verjaardag en huweliksbevestiging van Nelson Mandela sou wees nie. Die kort reis saam met hom het my in daardie stadium al klaar so baie verander. Gelukkig was ons te besig en onder te veel druk sodat ek nooit selfvoldaan en arrogant kon raak oor die plek waar ek myself op enige gegewe tyd bevind het nie.

Van 10 tot 12 September 1998 is ’n vergadering van die Suider-Afrikaanse Ontwikkelingsgemeenskap in Mauritius gehou. Lidstate het die lande van Suider-Afrika ingesluit en Suid-Afrika het dié keer as voorsitter opgetree. Staatshoofde het hierdie rol om die beurt vervul. Toe die president en mevrou Machel ’n paar dae voor die vergadering in Mauritius aankom, was daar reeds gerugte dat Lesotho, ’n klein koninkryk wat deur Suid-Afrika omsluit word, op die rand van ’n

staatsgreep was. Ons was in gereelde kontak met die eerste minister, Pakalitha Mosisili, en koning Letsie III van Lesotho. En al het ek nie verstaan wat aangaan nie, het ek geweet hulle is in die moeilikheid. Die president en adjunkpresident Thabo Mbeki was in die buiteland en minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi het as waarnemende president opgetree.

Nadat president Mandela as staatshoof beëdig is, het die Nasionale Party by die ANC aangesluit om die Regering van Nasionale Eenheid te vorm. Hulle het die land saam regeer. Maar teen hierdie tyd het die Regering van Nasionale Eenheid alle mag aan die ANC oorhandig en die Nasionale Party het hulself uit die regering verwyder. Die Inkatha Vryheidsparty was om dié rede die amptelike opposisie in die parlement en om minister Buthelezi, die leier van die party, as waarnemende president aan te wys terwyl die president en sy adjunk oorsee was, was die ANC se manier om te wys dat hulle hom vertrou.

Ek onthou die president was bitterlik moeg en ontsteld oor ’n voorval waarin honderd-vier-en-dertig mense volgens berigte dood is as gevolg van Suid-Afrika se inval in Lesotho, en waarna daar vandag nog verwys word as die grootste fout tydens president Mandela se bewind. Die president was letterlik dwarsdeur die nag op die foon in gesprekke met minister Buthelezi en die regering van Lesotho.

Om onder sulke omstandighede vir die eerste keer in Mauritius te wees, was glad nie pret nie. In plaas daarvan dat ons in die lieflike waters van die Indiese Oseaan geswem het, het ons na amptelike sake omgesien. Daar was bankette, vergaderings en ’n besoek aan die botaniese tuine. Ek sou eerder wou gaan swem as om na ’n uitsonderlike blom te staar wat blykbaar net een keer elke vyf-en-sewentig jaar oopgaan. Ons was ook moeg en ontsteld oor die gebeure in Suid-Afrika.

Die volgende dag is die Suider-Afrikaanse Ontwikkelingsgemeenskap se vergadering byeengeroep. Volgens die program sou die vergadering om tienuur begin, maar president Robert Mugabe van Zimbabwe was meer as ’n uur laat. President Mandela het nie daarvan gehou om as voorsitter by vergaderings op te tree nie en hy sou gewoonlik net ’n vergadering open en dan aan iemand anders die taak oorlaat om seker te maak prosedure word gevolg. Niemand het sy manier van doen bevraagteken nie en hy sou elke nou en dan

kommentaar lewer oor dit wat gesê word of net sy kop knik om te wys dat hy saamstem. Toe president Mugabe binnegestap het, was ’n ander staatshoof aan die woord. President Mandela het hom in die rede geval en verskoning gevra vir die onderbreking. Dit was nie sy gewone styl nie en die atmosfeer was gespanne. Stilte het oor die groot saal neergedaal. Dit was een van die min geleenthede waar hy enigiemand in die rede geval het.

President Mandela het gewag tot president Mugabe gaan sit, en toe het hy losgetrek, sommer so uit die vuis, en vir twintig minute gepraat oor hoe oneerbiedig dit is om ander mense se tyd te mors, en dat sommige staatshoofde hulself belangriker ag as ander en daarom dink hulle kan enige tyd opdaag. Hy het nie een keer president Mugabe se naam genoem nie, maar ons het almal geweet van wie hy praat, en daarna het hy woorde gebruik wat ek nooit sou vergeet nie: ‘Omdat jy ’n spesifieke pos beklee, beteken dit nie jy is belangriker as enigiemand anders nie. Jou tyd is nie meer waardevol as ander mense s’n nie. As jy laat kom, wys jy jy het geen respek vir ander mense se tyd nie en daarom geen respek vir ander mense nie, omdat jy jouself belangriker ag as hulle.’

Nadat president Mandela klaar gepraat het, het president Mugabe gewag dat die verrigtinge ’n entjie vorder en toe het hy opgestaan en saggies uitgeloop. Dit was die laaste keer dat ek enige soort interaksie tussen die twee van hulle gesien het en daar was nooit weer enige kontak waarvan ek weet nie, behalwe hoflike groete wanneer hulle saam op die verhoog by ’n Afrika-geleentheid moes optree.

President Mandela het gereeld die storie vertel dat Zimbabwe voor Suid-Afrika se demokrasie as die ster van die kontinent beskou is. Maar nadat Suid-Afrika ’n demokrasie geword het, het mense gesê die son het opgekom en die ster het verdwyn. Volgens my is dit een van die redes waarom president Mugabe so bitter gevoel het oor Suid-Afrika se ondernemings op die kontinent. In ’n meer onlangse onderhoud het hy teruggekap en gesê president Mandela was te veel van ’n heilige en dat hy te hard probeer het om wit mense ten koste van swart mense tevrede te stel. Meneer Mandela was as gevolg van sy ouderdom in daardie stadium nie meer in ’n posisie waar hy homself kon verdedig nie. Ek het geweet Mugabe het net gewag, ’n lang tyd gewag, om wraak te neem deur president Mandela in die openbaar te

probeer verneder. Sy opmerking het bewys dat hy glad nie verstaan wat in Suid-Afrika aangaan nie. Indien die fokus nie op versoening was nie, sou ons land in ’n vlammehel ten gronde gegaan het en in dieselfde gemors beland het waarin Zimbabwe vandag is.

Die president moes ’n staatsbesoek aan Saoedi-Arabië bring en ek is gevra om saam te gaan. John Reinders, hoof van protokol in die presidensie, en ek het ’n paar dae voor die res van ons afvaardiging saam met ’n paar veiligheidsmense na Riaad vertrek. Ek het korrespondensie ontvang van die Suid-Afrikaanse ambassade in Saoedi-Arabië, en personeellede het aangebied om vir my ’n abaya te huur. Dit is die kleed wat Moslemvroue dra om hulself te bedek. Aangesien ek nie geweet het waarvan hulle praat nie, het ek ingestem.

Toe ons in Riaad aankom, was dit vir my duidelik dat dié land se kultuur en godsdiens baie anders was as enigiets wat ek my kon indink. My abaya is by die lughawe aan my oorhandig en ek is meegedeel dat ek myself dadelik moes bedek, en so ook elke keer as ek in die openbaar verskyn. Op pad na die presidensiële gastehuis het ek ’n kitslesing gekry oor die Islamitiese geloof en Moslemkultuur. Ek was stomgeslaan om te hoor van al die reëls wat veral op vroue van toepassing is. Die meeste daarvan het ek nie ernstig opgeneem voor ek later daardie aand met sommige van die beamptes gepraat het nie. Ek is meegedeel dat mense nog steeds in die openbaar in Riaad tereggestel word indien hulle skuldig bevind word aan godsdienstige oortredings. Aangesien ek van nature ’n bietjie rebels was, het ek besluit ek gaan die grense wat hierdie geloof aan my as Westerling oplê, so ’n bietjie toets.

Ons het besluit om ’n nagmark te besoek terwyl ons wag vir die vergaderings later die aand. Ek het in die eerste beskikbare limo met ’n oop deur geklim en gehoor buite die motor begin mense in Arabies met mekaar stry. Dit het later geblyk dat die stryery gegaan het oor wie toegelaat sou word om saam met my in die motor te reis en wie nie. As ongetroude vrou was ek nie veronderstel om saam met enige man wat nie ’n familielid is, in ’n motor te ry nie. Veral en beslis nie ’n getroude man nie. Ek het uiteraard alleen verder gereis.

Die gewoonte is dat winkels eers tienuur die oggend oopmaak en teen twaalfuur elke dag sluit sodat almal by die moskees kan gaan bid. Eenuur was die winkels weer oop, maar hulle maak weer gereeld toe

sodat mense kan gaan bid. Jy kan voor in die ry by ’n winkel staan en dan uitgejaag word wanneer die oproepe vir gebede begin. Om hierdie rede is dit beter om die nagmark te besoek, waar alles oop sou bly tot baie laat en waar daar geen kans was dat alles in ’n oogwink toegemaak sou word sodat mense kon bid nie.

Ek is vooraf aangesê dat ek my oë moet oophou vir die Mattawa, die godsdienstige militêre polisie. Hulle is daar om seker te maak mense onderwerp hulle aan die Moslemkultuur. Hulle stap rond in uniforms wat baie soos dié van die gewone polisie lyk, maar hulle dra stokke wat in rooi verf gedoop is, het ek verneem. As hulle jou betrap dat jy nie by die reëls hou nie, slaan hulle jou oor die enkels en die rooi verf bly agter. As jy ’n tweede keer betrap word, neem hulle jou in hegtenis en wie weet wat dan gebeur. Ek is een keer by ’n mark gewaarsku: ‘Bedek jou, bedek jou’, maar ek het vinnig weggehardloop voor hulle my met die verf kon merk. Daar was soveel mooi matte waarna ek kon kyk en goed wat ek kon koop dat dit my aandag afgetrek het van die ander dinge om my. Ek het die feit waardeer dat dinge so maklik was in Suid-Afrika. Ek het ook die ervaring geniet, wat so anders was as enigiets waaraan ek gewoond was. Daardie tyd is ’n mens nog nie toegelaat om Saoedi-Arabië as ’n toeris te besoek nie en die visumproses is deeglik deur die Saoedi-owerhede bekyk. Ek het my besoek dus as ’n unieke en ’n baie bevoorregte geleentheid gesien.

Ons eerste vergadering was met die hoof van protokol, die aand voor president Mandela in die land sou aankom. Dis beslis nie een van die maklikste lande in die wêreld om in te werk nie, veral as jy ’n vrou is. Ons het dae lank gewag om ’n tyd te bevestig vir hul hoof van protokol om ’n program van een of ander aard te bespreek. Hul enigste antwoord sou wees: ‘Wag.’ En dan wag jy. Jy kan nêrens gaan nie en jy sit ure lank en wag vir ’n antwoord van die amptenare.

Die vergadering sou gehou word in die presidensiële paleis waar president Mandela sou oorbly. Aanvanklik het ’n man wat in sy tradisionele Arabiese kleed aangetrek was, vriendelik gelyk. Ek het oogkontak met hom vermy, soos ek voor die vergadering aangesê is om te doen. Saoedi-Arabië se hoof van protokol het die vergadering met die gewone hoflikhede begin en gesê hoe geëerd hulle was om president Mandela in die land te ontvang, ensovoorts. Ons het geëerd

gevoel, maar ek wou gehad het hy moet ophou sodat ons die besonderhede van die program kon bespreek. Dit was laat en ek was moeg, maar teen middernag het ons niks meer geweet van die program as vroeër nie. Teen daardie tyd het president Mandela se vliegtuig Suid-Afrika reeds verlaat.

John Reinders sou ’n vraag aan die hoof van protokol stel, en hy sou die foon optel en die gesprek in Arabies met iemand aan die ander kant voer. Hy sou die oproep beëindig en na die volgende vraag aanbeweeg. Na twee uur hiervan het ek genoeg gehad. John het besluit om buitentoe te gaan om te rook en ek het hom gevolg. Ons het dit wat binne aangaan bespreek en ek het vir hom gesê ek wil beheer oorneem wanneer ons weer ingaan. Dit was toe ook wat ek gedoen het. John was heeltemal bevoeg om alleen te onderhandel, maar hy het al die opsies opgebruik in sy poging om antwoorde uit hulle uit te kry. Ek het die reëls verontagsaam en in die Saoedi-protokolbeampte se oë gekyk en gesê: ‘Meneer, president Mandela is op pad hierheen in ’n vliegtuig. Dis die eerste keer in my lewe dat ek hoor van ’n staatsbesoek sonder ’n program terwyl die staatshoof reeds op pad is. Die president verwag van ons om te weet wat gaan gebeur wanneer hy aankom, maar in hierdie stadium help julle ons glad nie.’

Die hoof het probeer om my oë te vermy en die foon weer opgetel. Hy het homself toe verskoon en ek en John het begin lag. Dit was regtig belaglik. Toe hy ’n halfuur later terugkom, het ek my vervies. Dit was nou lank na eenuur in die oggend, en ek het met my vuis op die tafel geslaan en gesê: ‘Meneer, indien u nie nou vir ons besonderhede gee nie, sal ek instruksies gee dat die president se vliegtuig omdraai, aangesien ons nie van ons president kan verwag om in ’n vreemde land op te daag sonder ’n program vir sy besoek nie.’ Ek het gevoel hy ondermyn ons verantwoordelikhede teenoor die president en hy was eenvoudig nie gewillig om inligting met ons te deel nie. Die man het my duidelik verag. Vroue praat eenvoudig nie so met mans in daardie land nie.

‘Dame,’ het hy vir my gesê, ‘kalmeer asseblief.’

Dis die tweede ergste ding wat ’n mens vir my kan sê. Ek het geantwoord: ‘Ek sal nie kalmeer tensy u nóú vir ons die besonderhede gee nie.’

Hy het die foon opgetel en die persoon aan die ander kant aangesê om na die kantoor toe te kom. John het kalm vir my in Afrikaans gesê: 'Ek dink jy het jou punt gemaak.' Nie lank daarna nie het twee ander mans verskyn en ons het na 'n groter vergadersaal geskuif. 'n Program is aan ons voorgelê en hoewel al die tye nie heeltemal bevestig was nie, was daar ten minste 'n struktuur en 'n aanduiding van wat van ons president verwag word.

Die volgende oggend het ek agtergekom dat niemand van die paleispersoneel meer met my praat nie. Ek het aanvaar dit was weens my optrede die vorige nag. Ek het nie omgegee nie. Omtrent drie ure voor die president sou aankom en 'n uur voordat ons op pad was lughawe toe, het die hele paleis tot stilstand gekom na 'n aankondiging dat 'n prins opgedaag het. Almal het na die voordeur toe gehardloop en 'n ry gevorm. Ons het nie geweet wat om te verwag nie en ek is in kennis gestel dat dit een van tweeduisend prinse kon wees. Tot my groot verbasing was dit prins Bandar, president Mandela se goeie vriend wat toe Saoedi-Arabië se ambassadeur in die Verenigde State van Amerika was. Dit was duidelik dat almal by die paleis respek vir hom gehad het.

Toe hy instap, het hy gegroet met 'n knik van sy kop en reguit op my afgeloop en my gesoen. 'O, hallo, Zelda,' het hy gesê. Ek het uit die hoek van my oog opgemerk hoe mense se gesigte verstar. Ek was die enigste vrou daar, ongetroud, en hier soen die prins my. 'Hoe gaan dit, Zelda? Welkom!' Ons het 'n paar dingetjies, ditjies en datjies, vir mekaar gesê. Hy het saam met my na 'n sitkamer gestap waar hy my oor die president se aankoms en die program uitgevra het. Nadat hy weg is, is ek soos 'n prinses behandel.

Die Saoedi's is buitengewoon gasvrye mense. Hulle sal geen moeite ontsien om seker te maak dat jy gemaklik is nie. Indien jy jou gedra, natuurlik. Hulle is oor die algemeen vriendelik, mits jy hul kultuur en geloof respekteer. Daar het 'n paar vroueministers saam met Madiba aangekom, maar ons het verneem nie eens hulle is toegelaat om die staatsbanket of die ontmoeting met die koning by te woon nie. Al die vroue is na 'n private ete by 'n sakeman se huis geneem. Die staatsbanket wat die president en ander mans bygewoon het, het eers om middernag begin en hulle was eers ná tweeuur terug by die presidensiële gastehuis. Die volgende oggend was ons almal moeg,

maar die president was stiptelik met sy ontbyt om seweuur, soos altyd. Hy was ’n tagtigjarige man, en tog was sy geesdrif en gees dié van ’n jong man.

Die volgende dag met ons vertrek was ek siek en sat vir al die reëls en regulasies, en ek wou tuis in my eie omgewing wees. Toe ons by die lughawe vir ’n vlug met ’n kommersiële lugdiens instap, is die veiligheidspan voorgekeer en deursoek. Hulle het gewoonlik vuurwapens by hulle gedra, met lisensies wat deur die betrokke regering uitgereik is, en toerusting soos radio’s en hul eie metaalverklikkers wat hulle nodig gehad het om hul werk te verrig. Tog is hulle voorgekeer en deursoek, en hulle moes elke stukkie toerusting uitmekaarhaal. Ek het geen geheim van my afkeer aan die Saoedi-burokrasie gemaak nie. Goeie aarde, ons was op pad uit, nie op pad in nie! Wat maak dit saak wat ons uitneem?

Vreemd genoeg sou ek in die daaropvolgende jare nogal geheg raak aan Riaad. Ons is ’n paar keer terug soontoe. Wanneer ’n mens ’n plek eers leer ken het en weet wat om te verwag, raak alles makliker. Ek het van die kos gehou en geweet hoe om dinge te benader: kalm en geduldig. Ek reken ’n mens raak meer geduldig soos jy ouer word en ervaring opdoen. In al die Arabiese lande het ek geleer hul regerings gee selde vooraf vir ’n mens ’n program. Dis ’n geval van ‘maak gou, en wag’.

6

Running to Keep Up

The President visited a schools and clinic project in the Northern Cape on 19 February 1999. It was a Friday afternoon and I was working in Cape Town at the time. Virginia accompanied the President on his visit on that particular day. As I had befriended the commander of the Presidential Protection Unit in Cape Town, Hein Bezuidenhout, we decided to have a drink in their canteen to end the week and avoid peak-hour traffic when going home. These were the days before news spread as fast as it does now; not everyone had a cellphone and people were not connected on the internet to get news updates continuously.

As I prepared to join Hein in the canteen I received a call from former President P. W. Botha on my mobile; he wanted to speak to the President to tell him that Schalk Visagie had been shot. 'Lady, I want to talk to Mr Mandela right now.' He spoke to me in Afrikaans but he was obviously angry and irritated. He never called him President Mandela, but always Mr Mandela. It was as if he couldn't make the leap to having complete unconditional respect for Mr Mandela as a President. I told him that the President was in mid-air and I could hear that he didn't quite believe me. He ended the conversation without saying goodbye. Schalk was Mr Botha's son-in-law. He was a policeman and the President liked him as he was progressive in his thinking and clearly had some influence over his wife, Rozanne. Rozanne was very conservative and earlier the President had tried to get them to persuade her father to appear in front of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established in 1995.

On 11 February 1998, eight years after the President's release from jail, he invited Rozanne and Schalk Visagie, Rozanne's sister Elsa and her husband to join him for dinner. The President asked me to arrange

the dinner and I was somewhat uncomfortable calling on Rozanne Botha, knowing very well how the family felt about Nelson Mandela. It took me some hours to respond to the President's request. A request by the President for someone to have a meal with him was usually greatly appreciated and welcomed by those invited. I knew in this instance it might be different. It was clearly not a great deal for Rozanne to be invited by the President to have dinner, but I realized that they were still filled with anger and regret because their father was driven until his back was against the wall to surrender power at the end of apartheid and to hand over to President F. W. de Klerk, who would later call the first democratic elections in South Africa.

The President met with them over dinner to try and lobby them to persuade their father to appear in front of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a body set up by President Mandela's administration to allow people the opportunity to apply for amnesty for deeds they may have committed during the apartheid years. If perpetrators came clean and presented the truth on injustices they may have been party to, they could apply for amnesty. This was to give people on both sides of apartheid the opportunity to first of all make peace with themselves, but also for families who lost loved ones and who still had unanswered questions to get closure. People wanted answers and thousands of people in South Africa wanted closure surrounding the deaths or mysterious disappearances of loved ones. It was not a matter that needed closure by any one side only. South Africa needed to heal as a nation and it was only going to be possible if all parties decided to participate in the TRC hearings. The Botha family couldn't agree unanimously on the matter – Rozanne was especially fiercely opposed to it out of fear that her father could be prosecuted or humiliated – and former President Botha went to his grave years later with many answers that could have provided solace to many people.

I knew that the President would be concerned for Schalk so I tried to reach him, but was told that they had just taken off from the venue they had visited. They were en route back to Pretoria. News quickly broke of the incident and I could sense tension in the air. I thought therefore that I had to inform the President as on many occasions I'd learned something like this could snowball into a much bigger political issue if one procrastinated. I called the control tower of the South African airforce in Pretoria to contact the pilots and ask them to inform the President that Schalk Visagie had been shot. My idea was

to tell him once he landed in Pretoria that Mr Botha was livid and insisted on speaking to him.

Hein and I had our first drink. I told him what had happened and he called some of his colleagues in the police force to try and get more information. Schalk was previously part of a gang-related investigation unit in the police and from the information the police had at the time they suspected that it was possibly an act of revenge from a gang after he brought some of its members to book.

Then I received a call from the airforce to inform me that the President decided to turn his plane around mid-air and proceed to Cape Town. He'd instructed them to let me know and said that I would know what to do. Hein and I got into action. It was like gears falling into position as everyone started calling whoever had to be informed of the President's expected arrival in Cape Town. We decided to proceed to the airport ourselves. It was Friday afternoon and the traffic was moving at snail speed. Hein managed to organize half a convoy and an advance team to go to the hospital, which was not far from the airport. We were both very tense. We took our jobs extremely seriously and this was one of those occasions where that mattered. The President landed and while we drove to the hospital I briefed him.

Upon arrival at the hospital Rozanne appeared, obviously still in shock. Schalk was still in theatre being stabilized and the President called Rozanne and other family members into a private meeting room. Mr P. W. Botha wasn't there as he lived in a town called 'Wilderness' at the time, about five hours' travel from Cape Town. The President expressed his sympathy and offered support to the family in a genuinely sympathetic way. We called Mr Botha too and the President expressed his sympathy and sadness over the matter. Mr Botha was brief but told the President that he had warned him that crime in the country was getting out of hand and that the President had to really step up and take this to task. I couldn't hear the entire conversation but the President seemed calm while I could hear Mr Botha raising his voice on the other side. Then as we left, Rozanne accompanied us to the exit and told the President, waving her finger at him as her father was known for doing: 'Mandela, if something happens to Schalk tonight it will be on your conscience. It will haunt you for the rest of your life.' She was obviously in shock and I cannot imagine her fear at that point, but I thought she was completely out of line and disrespectful.

I was always very offended when someone didn't call him Mr or President but just addressed him using his first name or surname. In a way it was derogatory. And it was an Afrikaner thing to address people with respect (or then with the lack thereof if you didn't have respect for them). I turned to her and said: 'That's enough, Rozanne. We have to leave . . .' and we left. As we walked outside the President took my hand but he was quiet. I was visibly upset, and thinking back to that day I realize how much the world had changed for me by then. Here was the black President holding my hand to comfort me while we were leaving behind my people in distress. He was genuinely concerned for Schalk but I think he didn't take easy to all the emotions being flung around. Schalk did survive and we didn't hear from him again.

Like the country, I had moved a long way from the time of P. W. Botha and apartheid. Many people in South Africa, especially the black youth, feel that Madiba's attempts to reconcile and unify our country were over-credited. They are of the opinion that the moments when South Africa was unified were limited to sporting events when the country briefly appeared to be in celebration mode. According to them, those were superficial moments that did not last. I understand how they feel, although such thinking in my opinion is also prejudice. We have not made the progress in economic transformation which we had hoped for and generally people are frustrated and angry. Some young people even go as far as saying that Madiba sold out to the whites, because he did not force transformation fast enough. Yet, what South Africa needed at the time was healing and to present a consolidated front to the world to gain the confidence of international investors. Madiba was like true north on a compass: we all know where we are supposed to go but he knew that we had to take a slightly different approach to achieve stability first.

Some angry young people feel that things have not changed, but the advantage of my age is that I can attest to the change I have seen and experienced. I am a product of that change.

* * *

The end of an era was approaching. In May 1999 the second democratic elections were planned in South Africa. President Mandela repeatedly indicated throughout his term that he would only stay for one term of office, after which he would hand over the reins. He did

so mainly hoping that others would follow suit but also because I think he was eager to have a bit of freedom himself. In 1997 Deputy President Mbeki was elected President of the ANC and voted their Presidential candidate for the elections in 1999. President Mandela symbolically handed over power to the Deputy President two years into his term. He was adamant that Deputy President Mbeki was at the helm and that his own role was purely ceremonial. It wasn't that easy though. While the day-to-day running of the country was largely left to Deputy President Mbeki, President Mandela was still lawfully the executive head of state and there were certain obligations he couldn't give up.

We hardly had anything personally to do with Deputy President Mbeki and very seldom saw him in the buildings we shared. President Mandela would often call him to report events to him or even to ask for his advice. Being the considerate human being that he was, he never wanted to be seen to make anyone feel inferior to him. On the occasions that we did see the Deputy President their interactions were limited to formal exchanges, and I personally got the idea that the Deputy President felt that the President didn't always do the right thing. That was my personal impression from a distance. I also learned that Deputy President Mbeki's father, who was imprisoned with President Mandela, wanted a more senior role in government after his release but only became a Member of Parliament and that was apparently the cause of uneasiness. I never dwelled on it though. Mrs Zanele Mbeki was always friendly and stately but quiet.

I was literally surviving day by day. The President was depending on me even more than before, and even though a new private secretary had been appointed it still didn't prevent the President from calling me day and night. He would sometimes call me at 2 a.m. and ask me to remind him to do something the following morning. It was not that he was more considerate for those with families but he knew that I didn't mind him calling on me.

It is widely documented that there were differences within the ANC about who would succeed President Mandela. Cyril Ramaphosa and Thabo Mbeki were the contestants. Senior ANC members were divided on the matter. From the first time I met Mr Ramaphosa I liked him. Mr Mbeki was distant and appeared dismissive towards me. Regardless of my lack of knowledge about the ANC I was always trying to uphold the ANC's good intentions in public. I often wondered whether the President regretted supporting Mr Mbeki's nomination as

President of the ANC or his successor at a time after his retirement when the government really treated him badly, but soon learned that the President considered regret as the most useless emotion and there was no use in asking 'what if'.

President Mandela was always forthright in that he didn't run the country but that the Deputy President did most of the work. President Mandela's role was that of nation-builder and he passed with distinction. To this day I think history has provided us with the right leader at the right time, or South Africa could have easily gone up in flames. I often compare our democracy with the growing process of a child. Up to the age of five you simply have to feed the child, care for it and love it. That is what President Mandela did best. From five to fifteen years you have to start educating the child and shape it into a personality, and that is exactly what President Mbeki did. With distinction. Now we are in the teenager phase and we experience the growing problems in our country similar to that of any adolescent. And as with an adolescent we can no longer blame our youth and we have to start acting responsibly.

In the first few months of 1999 the President worked at a pace that would see any younger head of state crawling on all fours. He was campaigning for the ANC, building schools and clinics, attending to official obligations and in between finding time and insisting on fetching and dropping his wife at the airport, attending to his children's and grandchildren's issues and then also embarking on saying 'goodbye' or taking leave of structures, people, business, institutions and even foreign countries before his retirement. Or should I say from the outset, his first attempt at retirement? The President's private secretary, Virginia Engel, had a health condition and she was off sick for an extended period of time, so most of the travelling and work load came down on me. But I was ready to take on whatever was needed to see the President through the last couple of months of his term. Change is inevitable and I was ready to drive myself past the finish line, probably for the first time in my life at full speed. I often sat in planes and helicopters trying to comprehend what had happened to me. A certain sadness would then fill my heart. I hadn't fully experienced what had happened because I was so obsessed with doing more than what was expected of me, always over-delivering, that I probably missed some valuable opportunities to get a deeper understanding of what was historically happening around me.

On 1 April 1999 the President took representatives of McDonald's,

Datatec and Nokia to the Eastern Cape, visiting three different areas where he wanted these respective companies to build schools and clinics in the communities of Bizana, Mbongweni and Baziya, very remote communities in the rural Transkei. The President never had a McDonald's hamburger. He just never ate fast food and he didn't know what a hamburger was. It is not something he was brought up with and his distance from society also meant that he missed out on many things that evolved around us. We take it that everybody should know what a hamburger is. During his speech in the community where he introduced McDonald's the name slipped his mind and he referred to them as 'the people who make these sandwiches'. I thoroughly enjoyed that reference and so did the representatives from McDonald's. It also provided much laughter to the community. There were these moments, some of them which seem so distant to me now, when you completely forgot that this was Nelson Mandela.

The President had no problem calling together competitors to work together. In his schools and clinics project he would easily call together rivals, like the two cellular phone operators at the time or both BMW and Mercedes-Benz. When I once asked him about it he said that when people are competing to do good, it inspires them to do even better. It made perfect sense although I thought it was only Nelson Mandela that could get some rivals to sit together sometimes. It was entertaining to watch how companies would almost compete to showcase what they were able or willing to do.

* * *

President Mandela made sure he left not necessarily the best but the biggest for last. His last state visit was scheduled for April 1999 and would include Russia, Hungary, Pakistan and then China. He was hoping to strengthen ties with these countries prior to his departure from public office and to pave the way for a solid relationship to trade on in future. He also wanted to thank both Russia and China for their support during the apartheid years by honouring them with a state visit.

On 28 April 1999 we arrived in Moscow with all the fanfare, bells and whistles one could expect. President Boris Yeltsin was our host. We stayed in the Kremlin and I still consider it one of my most awkward experiences. I always felt like I was being watched, even alone in my room, although I was probably just imagining so.

Passages were as wide as highways and people behaved like machine-like robots. Emotions were rarely expressed and everything appeared to have been rehearsed a thousand times. It all unnerved me but, being a disciplinarian myself, I kind of liked it. Language was a big problem. It was difficult asking for food to the President's liking and then when it came to our own food it was even worse. Rich food and vodka for breakfast. The only way I could get an egg for breakfast was to imitate a chicken several times. Saying 'cluck cluck' in the Kremlin while flapping your imaginary wings is never very graceful.

We visited the burial sites of J. B. Marks and Moses Kotane, former ANC leaders and communists who were instrumental in shaping the President's life. We laid a wreath and spent a few minutes of silence around their grave sites.

Next we visited the mausoleum on the Red Square where Lenin's body was exhibited. One of the little pleasures of travelling with the President was that they would close down the mausoleum for our visit so we could do so in private without interference from the tourists around the site. On the few occasions that we actually did sight-seeing we avoided having to stand in queues to buy tickets or get access to places. Protocol officers briefed us before descending into the grave site: No talking, no eating or drinking and under any circumstances, no photographs. We quietly went down the steps until we saw Lenin's mummified body. No one uttered a word.

What we had forgotten was that the President's hearing was already not good, and when the Russian protocol officer briefed us the President in all likelihood didn't hear the instructions. We were all quiet, almost admiring the body of the dead Communist leader. It was kind of spooky. And then, without any warning, the President with his booming loud voice said: 'So, how long has he been lying here?' The protocol officer was shocked beyond belief and looked at us for explanation or order, I don't know which. No one responded, out of pure shock, and the President repeated the question to even more chaos. Zenani, his daughter who accompanied us on the visit, then said to him, 'Daddy, you are not allowed to talk,' and he whispered back but loud enough for anyone to hear: 'Oh OK, I'm sorry.'

We also went to watch the world-renowned ballet Swan Lake at the Bolshoi. I was very impressed to be able to say that I stayed in the Kremlin, saw Lenin and watched Swan Lake at the Bolshoi. The fact that I walked that history with Nelson Mandela added to my delight. And for an Afrikaner this was something quite out of the ordinary,

having spent so much time during my childhood praying for the abolishment of communism in these countries. Indeed times had changed.

The ballet was every bit of what I had imagined it would be. The dancing, decor, music, everything was brilliant. I sat right behind the President because he always wanted to know where I was in case he needed something. I touched his shoulder before the show started and told him I was right behind him in case he wanted water or anything.

Russians have a custom that they add 'ina' behind a man's surname to identify the wife of that person. Therefore Yeltsin's wife would be called Yeltsina. Just before the visit, I am told there was a discussion about my name in Maputo. The names that run in the Machel family, like Gracina, Josina and so on, sparked the discussion and apparently the President decided there that my name had to be changed to Zeldina. In Russia, with the occurrence of 'ina' at the end of these surnames, he was reminded of this discussion in Maputo and so he kept calling me Zeldina. We all found it very amusing. Needless to say, the name stuck and he called me Zeldina right up to the end, as every other person now does. I am reminded of him every time.

The President never realized the loudness of his voice and how recognizable it was. Between two of the ballet items he turned his head towards me and in the silence of the moment after the audience had stopped applauding he said, 'Zeldina, you and I should be doing that,' and pointed to the stage and ballerinas. We all burst out laughing and luckily I think only the South Africans and the few people in the audience from other countries but Russia could understand. It was hilarious and for minutes later we all laughed out loud. Luckily our laughter was drowned in the music but he enjoyed his own joke and kept on smiling for a long time.

It is also the only time I saw the President drinking any strong spirits, such as vodka. He was a stern believer that you should do what is possible not to offend the host, so he did exactly what was required of him. At the night of the state banquet he was heavily in conversation with President Yeltsin. President Yeltsin was a dramatic talker and, not knowing what they were discussing, it looked like they were arguing. In between they took a few vodka shots although President Mandela was only sipping his, and then without announcement President Yeltsin jumped up and left the room. He left President Mandela at the table for about fifteen minutes and it made me nervous as I thought they really had had a fight and he had left.

He returned later to say that he had a call from President Clinton which he had to take, and apologized during his speech. Back in the Kremlin I told the President about my worries and he laughed at my assumptions that he would have an altercation with President Yeltsin. He did however raise the issue of Lenin's burial with Yeltsin, telling him it was time for Lenin to go to his grave. President Yeltsin was adamant that Lenin should stay in Red Square. President Mandela disagreed with him. But they remained on good terms.

From Russia we went to Hungary. I think the President was excited to end his term in office and therefore the visit was relaxed and enjoyable. Our protocol officer in Hungary told us about twenty times that Budapest, the capital, is actually two separate cities, Buda and Pest, divided by a river. We ended up teasing one another about it, repeatedly asking everybody around us: 'Did you know that Budapest is actually two different cities?' Even the President checked a few times whether we knew it was two different cities and we enjoyed him participating in our teasing. His sense of humour never failed.

From Budapest we went to Pakistan for a two-day state visit and then continued on to Beijing in China. If you thought that you had a problem in Russia with food and the language barrier, China was worse. We were told that two days before our visit all factory activity was stopped to clear the air of pollution. Whether that was really honestly the truth I don't know, but I probably wanted to believe it. Again I noticed in Beijing that everything worked like a machine. Emotions were far off and people were rehearsed in their responses. Some of the delegation went to see the Great Wall of China but I didn't feel that it was wise to leave the President alone for that long, especially in a country where hardly anyone spoke English and he definitely didn't speak or understand a word of Mandarin. Our colleagues returned, exhausted, and I was a little sad that I didn't see the Wall but decided that everything was worth the sacrifice.

* * *

Returning to South Africa we were gearing up to take our leave from the Presidency after the elections. Luciano Pavarotti was hosting a concert in Pretoria and the President and Mrs Machel attended the concert. It was very emotional for us all and almost announced in a stately way the beginning of the end of the term. The President was

looking forward to his retirement. Little did I know that he was looking forward to doing less of what he had to do and doing more of what he wanted to do.

On 14 May the Presidency hosted a farewell for its entire staff attended by the President. It was a wonderful event and a party for us all. Once the President left the function we danced until late at night, saying our goodbyes. By now we had fostered great friendships and we were celebrating a successful term and great achievements. In any normal office environment you become friends with people, but in a Presidency it is as if you know there is a shelf life to the particular structure's existence and when the sell-by date approaches you become sentimental and emotional, even if it feels to you at the time that the term was dominated by challenges. You don't even necessarily like everyone but you foster bonds with people probably because you are forced into a situation of this highly stressed environment and you learn to co-exist for the benefit of the success of the legacy of that term. We had a fairly small office in comparison to the other Presidencies that followed. We were effective and although we had made our fair share of mistakes, we had done a good job in supporting the President's focus on reconciliation and building national unity.

We were campaigning for the elections day and night and travelling around the country non-stop in the weeks leading up to the vote. I was tired and emotionally depleted from pure exhaustion. The President repeated the same speech, off the cuff, over and over again to such an extent that I could anticipate exactly what he would say next. It is that last stretch when you see the finish line and you decide to give it your everything until you cross that line. He was there; I was about two laps behind him. People would often say: 'If the President can operate at that speed, why are you tired?' What people didn't consider is that the support staff didn't have their own support staff. No one bought the bread in my house, no one did the washing or drove me from point A to point B. You had to invent ways to deal with the ordinary course of life in between while dealing with the rest of the President's life on his behalf. I wouldn't say it was easier on him, and he was more than twice my age, but one underestimates the stress the most mundane things can cause in your life if you continuously work at such speed as we did.

On 19 May, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud from Saudi Arabia arrived in South Africa for a

farewell visit. His plane was set to arrive at around 7 p.m. By 11 p.m. I was still at the airport awaiting him. The President asked me to be at the airport to ensure that things went smoothly. We waited and waited and I was irritable by the time the plane touched down. We still had a dinner to attend and I kept phoning the President to update him on the Saudis' arrival time. Even though he was tired he was willing to wait until the Crown Prince arrived and willing to attend a dinner at whatever hour. By midnight the Crown Prince had arrived at the Presidency in Pretoria with his entourage of fifty-plus and the dinner commenced. One of my colleagues, Lizanne van Oudshoorn from Protocol, was on duty too that night. When the President stood up to start his speech at the dinner, I asked Lizanne to stand in for me as I was at breaking point. It was close to 2 a.m. and having heard the President's campaign speech four times earlier that day I realized that I was too tired to listen to it for the fifth time. Regardless of the fact that he must have been tired, he was optimistic about the elections and the future of South Africa, sounding ever so energetic whenever he spoke about the prospects of the new South Africa. The President wasn't fazed about the time and he enjoyed the Crown Prince's visit.

On 2 June 1999 the second democratic elections were held in South Africa. President Mandela went to the polling station close to his house and cast his vote. It was always intriguing to watch. When the President wasn't doing anything impressive or spectacular, there was no audience. When he went about everyday life, few people were interested. But the day he voted, the strangest people showed up wanting to accompany him to the polling station. Few people actually took the time and trouble to take interest in what was challenging for him. It was clear that self-interest was going to become an agenda for many people even way beyond his retirement. After his vote the media asked him: 'Who did you vote for, Mr President?' and he responded: 'For myself.' I thought that was funny although people could have misinterpreted it.

Before the elections President Mandela called me into his office one day. He asked me to sit down and I knew that something serious was to follow. He hardly ever asked me so formally to sit down. But a formal request like this was different and his tone was serious. 'Zeldina, I want you to retire with me.' My response was: 'Well Khulu, I'm a bit young to retire but if you mean you want me to keep working for you, of course I will.' He just laughed. After five years he knew me better than anyone else. He had seen me grow up in a way

and thinking back at earlier days he must have laughed when he was by himself about my ignorance and stupidity. But he recognized my tenacity and commitment.

Even though our lives were so different, I realized that there is a chance this person will not abandon me. Nelson Mandela didn't leave me behind. He took me with him. It was obviously one of the greatest, if not the greatest honour of my life, being chosen by Madiba to serve him beyond his retirement.

Every retiring President in South Africa is afforded some rights in retirement. One of these is keeping a full-time secretary on the payroll of the President's office but then using his/her services exclusively. It also included a telephone line, some administrative support such as a fax machine, etc., but that was the basics apart from security and official car transport within South Africa. Days before his retirement we started packing up our personal belongings at our offices in the Union Buildings.

* * *

On 11 June the President presented the last set of credentials to incoming ambassadors. I watched him really enjoying it for this last time. I was always surprised at his memory when it came to remembering the names of heads of state.

On 13 June the 'Brother Leader', Colonel Gaddafi of Libya, visited the President to bid farewell. Since the early 1990s the President had been involved in the process related to the court case that dealt with the Lockerbie plane incident in which 270 people were killed. First Mr Mandela asked President George Bush, Snr, in the early 1990s to agree that the trial be held in a neutral country. President Bush agreed to the suggestions from Mr Mandela but the British Prime Minister, John Major, refused. Then when Tony Blair became Prime Minister he put the request to him and they agreed that the case would be heard under Scottish law in The Hague in the Netherlands. A long process followed, during which the President negotiated with Gaddafi to have the two suspects delivered to The Hague, and finally Prince Bandar from Saudi and Prof. Jakes Gerwel succeeded in persuading the Brother Leader to deliver the two suspects for trial.

Later, in 2002, we visited Barlinnie Prison in Scotland where the Libyan Abdelbaset al-Megrahi was serving a minimum twenty-seven-year sentence following that trial. Al-Megrahi was unhappy with his

conditions and sent word through Gaddafi that he wanted to speak to Madiba. There was little Gaddafi could do himself, as he was still considered an enemy by the West despite keeping his promise of delivering the suspects of the Lockerbie bombing and compensating the families of the victims who died in the plane crash. Yes, compensation could never bring back a life, but Gaddafi had delivered his promise yet still the West did not suspend all sanctions as they had promised. There was nothing Madiba could do to convince the West to suspend the sanctions. He had great appreciation for Gaddafi acting reliably and was willing to look into al-Megrahi's situation when asked to do so.

As we entered the prison surrounded by Scottish prison officials the mood was sombre. We entered al-Megrahi's cell, which consisted of a living area, a bathroom and kitchen. Comparing that to Madiba's old cell on Robben Island I thought al-Megrahi had something more like a suite. He was obviously touched to receive Madiba and we conversed with him for a long time. He produced evidence that he thought was not taken into consideration in court and he complained that it was very difficult for him to practise his Islamic faith, since he was in solitary confinement and was not able to worship with others. Madiba listened carefully and with sympathy but clearly he was not going to argue for the case to be re-opened. Afterwards, Madiba addressed a huge press conference, during which he pleaded for al-Megrahi to be moved to another prison in a Muslim country. (Al-Megrahi was later moved to Greenock jail out of solitary confinement and later released as he was terminally ill. He passed away in 2012 at the age of sixty in Tripoli.)

Prince Bandar and Prof. Gerwel were both awarded the Order of Good Hope, South Africa's highest honour, for their success in bringing about the trial in The Hague. The President had a close relationship with Gaddafi as a result of these negotiations and Gaddafi had to know that he could trust Madiba before he would co-operate. I also suspected that Madiba was entertained by the fact that the Brother Leader publicly expressed his fearlessness of the West. The West had not supported President Mandela during the time of apartheid, in general maintaining their links with the apartheid regime as a bulwark against communism. It was therefore an emotional day for Gaddafi when he came to bid farewell to President Mandela from his Presidency.

We only saw him on a few occasions after President Mandela's

retirement and the last time, during President Zuma's inauguration, I made a point to ask whether he didn't want to pay a courtesy call upon Madiba. I never received a response and Madiba was shocked when he was killed in 2011. No person deserves to die without dignity. I will never condone what he did to his own people but in my view he was always good to us and to Madiba and he earned respect in our eyes for that and always delivering his promises during those negotiations. Madiba was loyal to those in whom he invested friendship and the Brother Leader was one of them. He never omitted to point out the mistakes he thought Gaddafi made, but they maintained mutual respect even while expressing their differences at times. Another of Madiba's great lessons: you can have a vast difference of opinion with someone but that never justifies disrespect.

* * *

We travelled to Cape Town for the swearing in of the new President and Parliament and to prepare for the inauguration of President Mbeki in Pretoria on 16 June. Attending the inauguration at the Union Buildings it was the first time that I saw any kind of interaction between Mrs Machel and Mrs Winnie Madikizela Mandela.

Up to that point I had only seen Mrs Mandela at a distance on a few occasions. We had no contact with her of any kind. It was one of those unspoken rules that when you work for the President you don't ask questions about his relationships with his family or his former wives. Apart from the four grandchildren who lived with the President we only occasionally saw Zindzi and Zenani, the two daughters from that marriage. When I saw the look in their eyes when Mrs Mandela and Mrs Machel passed each other in the crowd at the inauguration it scared me. There was no relationship between the two women and I could never imagine them being friendly.

I have learned over the years to have appreciation for Mrs Winnie Mandela. I was angry at her when I learned that she maintained physical distance from Madiba following his release, yet her affair with Dali Mpofu was widely talked about. It must have hurt him. Yet Mrs Machel was the one to bring me around to accepting and appreciating the fact that if it had not been for Mrs Mandela, Madiba may have given up hope over the long years in prison. Apart from the fact that she was mother to two of his children, she represented hope for him and she must have been the person he dreamt about at night;

the person he longed to touch and to be with. I grew a sense of understanding for her and also how lonely she must have become without him. It is only once we really experience loneliness ourselves that we can fully comprehend its darkness, and as I matured awareness of these things in life often occupied my mind.

On the day of the inauguration of President Mbeki we woke up as usual and prepared for the ceremony. We attended the ceremony, after which President Mandela returned to his office in the Union Buildings to collect his personal belongings. The office was deserted because it was a public holiday. As I entered the glass doors where I first entered his office five years earlier I quietly started sobbing. He held Mrs Machel's hand as we walked down the passage to his office. I walked a few yards ahead of them and the only sound to announce their arrival was the familiar sound of the security door opening in front of them as they approached and automatically closing behind them. Our offices leading to his were already empty. I left them alone in his office as they went through his drawers and bathroom to clear the limited items he had left in the office. I later took them a small box in which we packed his things and he saw that I was crying. He looked at me and said: 'Zeldina, you are overreacting.' He said those same words back in 1994 when we first met; he said them under different circumstances and I was crying at that time for exactly the opposite reasons. In 1994 I was crying because of guilt and fear of what lay ahead; now I was crying because it was all over. Little did I know what really lay ahead . . .

6

Volspoed om by te bly

Op 19 Februarie 1999 het die president 'n skool- en kliniekprojek in die Noord-Kaap besoek. Dit was 'n Vrydagmiddag en ek het toe in Kaapstad gewerk. Daardie dag het Virginia die president op sy besoek vergesel. Ek en Hein Bezuidenhout, die bevelvoerder van die presidensiële beskermingseenheid in Kaapstad, het bevriend geraak en

ons het besluit om die week af te sluit met ’n drankie in hul kantien om die spitsverkeer te vermy. Dit was in die dae voordat die nuus so vinnig versprei het soos deesdae. Nie almal het selfone gehad nie en dus was die nuus beperk tot wat jy op die radio of TV gehoor of in koerante gelees het.

Terwyl ek gereed gemaak het om by Hein in die kantien aan te sluit, het ek ’n oproep van oudpresident P.W. Botha op my selfoon ontvang. Hy wou met die president praat om vir hom te sê sy skoonseun Schalk Visagie is geskiet. ‘Dame,’ het hy gesê, ‘ek wil nóú met meneer Mandela praat.’ Hy het Afrikaans gepraat en hy was duidelik woedend en geïrriteerd. Hy het Madiba nooit president Mandela genoem nie, maar meneer Mandela of net Mandela. Dit was asof hy nie die stappie vorentoe kon neem om Madiba onvoorwaardelik as president te respekteer nie. Hy het die gesprek afgesluit sonder om te groet. Schalk was ’n polisieman en die president het van hom gehou, aangesien hy oopkop was en duidelik ’n goeie invloed op sy vrou, Rozanne, gehad het. Rozanne was konserwatief in haar denke en vroeër het die president hulle gevra om haar pa te probeer oortuig om voor die Waarheids-en-Versoeningskommissie te getuig wat in 1995 tot stand gebring is.

Op 11 Februarie 1998, agt jaar na die president se vrylating uit die gevangenis, het hy Rozanne en Schalk, asook Rozanne se suster, Elsa, en haar man vir ete genooi. Die president het my gevra om die ete te reël en dit was vir my effens ongemaklik om Rozanne te bel, omdat ek geweet het hoe haar familie oor Nelson Mandela voel. Dit het my ’n paar uur geneem om aan die president se versoek te voldoen. Mense het gewoonlik geëerd gevoel om ’n ete-uitnodiging van die president te ontvang. Ek het geweet dit sou in hierdie geval anders wees. Natuurlik het die idee van ’n ete saam met die president Rozanne nie veel aangestaan nie, en boonop was daar nog baie woede omdat haar pa hom met sy rug teen die muur bevind het en die mag aan F.W. de Klerk moes oorhandig toe apartheid na aan sy einde was. Meneer De Klerk het kort daarna Suid-Afrika se eerste demokratiese verkiesing uitgeroep.

Die president wou hulle tydens die ete vra om hul pa te oorreed om voor die Waarheids-en-Versoeningskommissie te getuig, ’n liggaam wat deur meneer Mandela se regering op die been gebring is om

mense die geleentheid te bied om aansoek te doen om amnestie vir dade wat hulle tydens die apartheidsjare gepleeg het. Dit sou mense aan albei kante van die vryheidstryd die kans gun om vrede met hulself te maak, maar ook aan familielede van slagoffers ’n plek gee waar hulle afsluiting en vertroosting kan vind. Mense van beide kante wou antwoorde hê en derduisende van hulle wou meer te wete kom oor die dood of onopgeloste verdwyning van hul geliefdes. Suid-Afrika moes van sy wonde genees, en dit kon net gebeur indien alle partye sou instem om aan die kommissie deel te neem. Die Botha-gesin kon nie eenstemmigheid bereik nie. Veral Rozanne het heftig daarteen beswaar gemaak, uit vrees dat haar pa vervolg of verneder sou word. Meneer Botha is jare later graf toe, moontlik met antwoorde wat aan baie mense troos sou kon bied.

Ek het geweet president Mandela sou besorg wees oor Schalk en ek het hom probeer bel, maar ek het verneem hulle het pas opgestyg en was op pad terug Pretoria toe. Nuus oor die voorval het verbasend vinnig versprei, en ek kon die spanning in die lug aanvoel. Om dié rede het ek gevoel ek moet die president so gou moontlik laat weet. So iets kon baie vinnig buite beheer raak indien jy nie dadelik optree nie. Ek het die beheertoring van die Suid-Afrikaanse Lugmag in Pretoria gekontak en gevra dat hulle die nuus dat Schalk geskiet is aan die vlieëniers moes oordra sodat hulle president Mandela daarvan in kennis kon stel. Sodra hulle geland het, sou ek hom vertel het meneer Botha is woedend en dat hy daarop aandring om met hom te praat.

Ek en Hein was besig met ons drankies. Ek het hom vertel wat gebeur het en hy het van sy vriende in die polisie gebel om meer te probeer uitvind. Schalk was vroeër lid van ’n polisie-ondersoekspan na bendebedrywighede, en volgens beskikbare inligting kon dit ’n wraakanval op hom gewees het nadat hy van die bendelede voor stok gekry het.

Terwyl ons nog daar gesit het, het die lugmag ons laat weet president Mandela het die vlieëniers opdrag gegee om om te draai en reguit Kaapstad toe te vlieg. Ons het besluit om self ook lughawe toe te ry. Dit was Vrydagmiddag en die verkeer het teen ’n slakkepas gevorder. Hein kon ’n halwe konvooi gereed kry en ’n voorspan uitstuur hospitaal toe, wat naby die lughawe is. Ons was albei baie gespanne. Ons is baie ernstig oor ons werk, en hierdie was ’n geval

waar dit belangrik was. Die president se vliegtuig het geland, en ek het in die motor op pad hospitaal toe vir hom verduidelik hoe sake staan.

Toe ons by die hospitaal aankom, het Rozanne haar verskyning gemaak, duidelik steeds geskok. Schalk was nog in die teater om gestabiliseer te word, en die president het Rozanne en ander familielede na ’n private vergadersaal geroep. Meneer Botha was nie daar nie. Hy het in daardie stadium in Wilderness gebly, ongeveer vyf uur per motor van Kaapstad af. Die president het sy meegevoel teenoor die familie uitgespreek en ’n mens kon sien dit kom uit sy hart. Ons het meneer Botha ook gebel en die president het sy hartseer en medelye oorgedra. Meneer Botha het kortaf gesê hy het die president gewaarsku dat misdaad besig was om handuit te ruk en dat hy daarteen moes optree. Ek kon nie die hele gesprek volg nie, maar die president was kalm terwyl ek meneer Botha harder hoor praat het aan die ander kant. Toe ons vertrek, het Rozanne saam met ons tot by die uitgang gestap, haar vinger na die president geswaai soos haar pa op sy berugte manier in die verlede gemaak het en gesê: ‘Mandela, as daar vanaand iets met Schalk gebeur, gaan dit op jóú gewete rus. Dit sal vir die res van jou lewe by jou spook.’ Sy was duidelik nog geskok en ek kon my nie haar vrees indink op daardie oomblik nie. Maar ek het tog gedink dit was onnodig en oneerbiedig.

Ek het my altyd vervies wanneer iemand Madiba nie ‘meneer’ of ‘president’ genoem het nie en hom sommer op sy voornaam of van aangespreek het. Ek het gevoel dit is verkleinerend. En Afrikaners was bekend daarvoor dat hulle mense met respek behandel, of, as hulle geen respek vir iemand gehad het nie, om dit duidelik te wys. Ek het na haar gedraai en gesê: ‘Dis genoeg, Rozanne, ons moet gaan’ en ons het vertrek. Toe ons uitstap het die president my hand gevat, maar hy was stil. En wanneer ek terugdink aan daardie dag, besef ek hoe baie my wêreld in daardie stadium reeds verander het. Hier het die swart president my hand vasgehou om my te troos terwyl ons my mense agterlaat in hul oomblik van nood. Hy was regtig besorg oor Schalk, maar ek dink die emosies wat so hoog geloop het, het dinge nie vir hom maklik gemaak nie. Schalk het oorleef, maar ons het nie weer van hom gehoor nie.

Net soos die land het ek ver weg beweeg van die tyd van P.W.

Botha en apartheid. Baie mense in Suid-Afrika, veral die swart jeug, voel Madiba se pogings om met wit mense te versoen en ons land te verenig, kry meer krediet as wat dit verdien. Hulle meen Suid-Afrika was net verenig tydens groot sportgebeurtenisse, wanneer die land kortstondig saam gejuig het. Volgens hulle was dit oppervlakkige kosmetiese oomblikke wat nie regtig 'n verskil gemaak het nie. Ek verstaan hoe hulle voel, hoewel daardie soort denke na my mening ook maar 'n soort vooroordeel is. Ons het nie die soort ekonomiese vooruitgang en transformasie ondergaan waarvoor ons gehoop het nie en oor die algemeen is mense gefrustreerd en kwaad. Party jong mense gaan so ver as om te sê dat Madiba aan die wit mense uitverkoop het omdat hy nie transformasie vinnig genoeg afgedwing het nie. Maar wat Suid-Afrika in daardie stadium nodig gehad het, was heling. Die land moes 'n verenigde front vorm om vertroue by internasionale beleggers te skep. Madiba was soos ware noord op 'n kompas. Ons almal het geweet waarheen ons veronderstel was om op pad te wees, maar hy het geweet 'n mens moet miskien 'n effens ander rigting inslaan om eers stabiliteit te verseker.

Die woedende jong mense het gevoel dinge het nie verander nie, maar met die voordeel van my ouderdom kan ek getuig van die verandering wat ek gesien en ervaar het. Ek is 'n produk van daardie verandering.

Ons het op die einde van 'n era afgestuur. Die tweede demokratiese verkiesing in Suid-Afrika sou in Mei 1999 plaasvind. President Mandela het keer op keer tydens sy termyn as president gesê dit sou sy laaste wees. Daarna sou hy die leisels oorgee. Hy het dit gedoen hoofsaaklik in die hoop dat hy 'n voorbeeld aan sy opvolgers kan stel. Maar ek glo hy wou ook 'n bietjie van sy vryheid terughê. In 1997 is adjunkpresident Thabo Mbeki tot president van die ANC verkies en as die party se presidensiële kandidaat vir die verkiesing in 1999 aangewys. President Mandela het die mag simbolies aan die adjunkpresident oorhandig twee jaar nadat sy termyn begin het. Hy het gereeld gesê meneer Mbeki is in beheer en hyself was slegs 'n seremoniële leier. Maar dit was nie so maklik nie. Hoewel president Mandela die daaglikse werksaamhede van die land tot 'n groot mate aan adjunkpresident Mbeki oorgelaat het, was hy nog steeds die uitvoerende hoof van die staat en dit het sekere pligte van hom vereis.

Ons het bitter selde enigiets met meneer Mbeki te doen gehad. Hy was nie baie in die gebou waar ons gewerk het nie. President Mandela sou hom bel om hom op hoogte van sake te bring of selfs om raad te vra. Omdat hy 'n bedagsame mens was, wou hy nooit gehad het iemand moet aan homself as die president se mindere dink nie. Wanneer die twee van hulle wel bymekaargekom het, was hul interaksie formeel en ek het die idee gekry dat die adjunkpresident gevoel het die president was soms op die verkeerde spoor. Dit was my persoonlike mening van 'n afstand af. Ek het ook verneem adjunkpresident Mbeki se pa, oom Govan, wat saam met president Mandela op Robbeneiland gevange gehou is, wou 'n meer senior rol in die regering speel ná sy vrylating, maar hy het net 'n parlementslid geword en dit was waarskynlik die rede vir adjunkpresident Mbeki se ongemak. Ek het nooit te veel aandag daaraan gegee nie. Mevrou Zanele Mbeki was altyd vriendelik en statig, maar stil.

Ek het letterlik van dag tot dag oorleef. Die president het meer op my gesteun as vroeër en hoewel 'n nuwe private sekretaresse aangestel is, het dit hom nie verhinder om my dag en nag te bel nie. Hy sou my soms tweeuur die oggend bel en vra om hom die volgende dag aan iets te herinner. Dis nie asof hy meer bedagsaam was teenoor mense met gesinne nie, maar hy het geweet dat dit my nie pla as hy my bel nie.

Dit is breedvoerig gedokumenteer dat daar geskille binne die ANC was oor wie president Mandela moes opvolg. Cyril Ramaphosa en Thabo Mbeki was die mededingers. Senior ANC-lede kon nie ooreenstem nie. Van die eerste keer dat ek meneer Ramaphosa ontmoet het, het ek van hom gehou. Meneer Mbeki was afsydig en dit het gelyk asof hy my nie as iemand beskou wat sy aandag verdien het nie. As gevolg van my gebrekkige kennis van die ANC het ek altyd probeer om die party se goeie bedoelinge in die openbaar uit te dra. Ek het baie gewonder of president Mandela spyt was dat hy meneer Mbeki ondersteun het vir die pos van president van die ANC of as sy opvolger, ná sy aftrede, toe die regering hom regtig stief behandel het. Maar ek het gou geleer dat die president spyt as 'n waardelose emosie beskou het en dat hy nooit 'Wat as?' gevra het nie.

President Mandela het altyd reguit gesê dat hy nie in beheer van sake staan nie, maar dat die adjunkpresident die meeste van die werk

doen. Meneer Mandela se rol was dié van nasiebouer en hy het met onderskeiding daarin geslaag. Tot vandag toe dink ek die geskiedenis het ons van die regte leier op die regte tyd voorsien. Anders kon Suid-Afrika baie maklik in 'n vlammehel vergaan het. Ek het ons demokrasie met die groeiproses van 'n kind vergelyk. Tot en met die ouderdom van vyf wil jy net vir die kind kos gee, na hom omsien en lief wees vir hom, en dit is wat president Mandela baie goed kon doen. Tussen vyf en vyftien moet jy die kind opvoed en help vorm gee aan sy persoonlikheid. Daarin het president Mbeki met onderskeiding geslaag. Nou is ons in die tienerfase en ons ervaar die groeipyne wat elke tiener het. En net soos 'n tiener kan ons nie ons kleintyd vir alles die skuld gee nie. Ons moet verantwoordelikheid aanvaar.

In die eerste paar maande van 1999 het die president teen 'n pas gewerk wat 'n jonger staatshoof op sy knieë sou dwing. Hy het stemme vir die ANC gewerf, skole en klinieke laat bou, amptelike pligte uitgevoer en tussendeur die tyd gevind om sy vrou by die lughawe op en af te laai, na sy kinders en kleinkinders se probleme om te sien en ook afskeid te neem van mense, maatskappye, instellings en oorsese lande voor sy aftrede. Of sal ek dit sommer nou al sê: sy eerste poging om af te tree. Die president se private sekretaresse, Virginia Engel, het gesondheidsprobleme gehad en was lank afwesig van die werk, wat beteken het ek moes meer gereeld reis en meer van die werk doen. Maar ek was bereid om enigiets aan te pak om die president deur sy laaste paar maande te help. Verandering is onafwendbaar, en ek was gereed om op die wenpaal af te pyl, dalk vir die eerste keer in my lewe op volle vaart. Ek het gereeld in vliegtuie en helikopters gesit en gewonder wat besig is om met my te gebeur. Ek was effens hartseer. Ek het nie alles ervaar soos ek kon nie, omdat ek te hard probeer het om meer te doen as wat van my verwag is, altyd meer, en dat ek waarskynlik kanse verspeel het om 'n dieper begrip te ontwikkel van die dinge in die geskiedenis wat om my gebeur.

Op 1 April 1999 het die president verteenwoordigers van McDonald's, Datatec en Nokia saamgeneem Oos-Kaap toe waar hy drie gebiede besoek het waar hy wou hê dié maatskappye skole en klinieke moes bou vir die gemeenskappe van Bizana, Mbongweni en Baziya, verafgeleë plekke in die landelike Transkei. Die president het nooit 'n

hamburger geëet nie. Hy het eenvoudig nie kitskos geëet nie, en het nie eens geweet wat 'n hamburger is nie. Dis nie iets waarmee hy grootgemaak is nie, en aangesien hy so lank van die samelewing geïsoleer was, het daar dinge gebeur waarvan hy nie kennis gedra het nie. Ons aanvaar dat almal weet wat 'n hamburger is. Maar terwyl hy 'n toespraak gelewer het in die gebied waar hy McDonald's voorgestel het, het die woord hom ontgaan en hy het na hulle verwys as 'die mense wat daardie toebroodjies maak'. Ek het baie van daardie beskrywing gehou, en die maatskappy se verteenwoordigers ook. Die mense van die gemeenskap het lekker gelag. Daar was oomblikke soos hierdie, wat nou vir my so ver in die verlede lyk, wat mens heeltemal vergeet het dat dit Nelson Mandela was met wie jy te doen gehad het.

Die president het die gawe besit om teenstanders te ooreed om ten gunste van 'n waardige doelwit saam te span. Só kon hy twee selfoonmaatskappye, of Mercedes-Benz én BMW, by sy skool- en kliniekprojekte betrek. Ek het hom eenkeer daarna uitgevra, en hy het gesê maatskappye wat meeding om 'n goeie saak maak 'n groter bydrae as wat hulle andersins sou. Dit het sin gemaak, maar ek het geweet net Nelson Mandela was in staat om sekere mededingers te laat saamwerk. Dit was vermaaklik om te kyk hoe hulle amper probeer het om mekaar te troef en te spog met dit wat hulle bereid was om te doen of te gee.

President Mandela het seker gemaak hy sluit sy termyn af met 'n poging wat nie noodwendig sy beste sou wees nie, maar wel die grootste. Sy laaste staatsbesoek is vir April 1999 beplan en sou Rusland, Hongarye, Pakistan en China insluit. Hy wou voor sy aftrede bande met hierdie lande versterk en die weg vir stewige handelsbetrekkinge in die toekoms baan. Hy wou Rusland en China ook met 'n staatsbesoek bedank vir hul steun tydens die apartheidsjare.

Ons het op 28 April 1999 in Moskou aangekom, en ons is ontvang met die ophef en gejuig wat 'n mens sou verwag. President Boris Jeltsin was ons gasheer. Ons het in die Kremlin tuisgegaan en ek beskou dit as een van die ongemaklikste ervarings van my loopbaan. Ek het gevoel ek word die hele tyd dopgehou, selfs in my kamer, maar dit was waarskynlik nie so nie. Die gange was so breed soos snelweë en mense het soos robotte opgetree. Emosie was skaars en dit het

gelyk asof alles ’n duisend keer vooraf ingeoefen is. Dit het my ontsenu, maar omdat ek van dissipline hou, was dit op ’n vreemde manier vir my lekker. Taal was ’n groot probleem. Dit was moeilik om kos te bestel waarvan die president sou hou en wanneer dit by ons kos kom, was dit nog erger. Ryk kosse en vodka vir ontbyt. Die enigste manier waarop ek ’n eier vir ontbyt kon bestel, was om ’n hoender ’n paar keer na te boots. Dis moelik om op ’n elegante manier in die Kremlin ‘kloek-kloek’ te sê terwyl jy jou verbeelde vlerkies klap.

Ons het J.B. Marx en Moses Kotane se laaste rusplekke besoek. Hulle was ANC-lede en kommuniste wat die president se lewe help vorm het. Ons het ’n krans gelê en ’n paar minute in stilte by die grafte deurgebring.

Daarna het ons Lenin in sy praalgraf op die Rooiplein besigtig. Een voordeel van ’n reis saam met die president was dat hulle die graf vir die publiek en toeriste toegemaak het, sodat ons sonder inmenging daarna kon kyk. Waar ons ook al besienswaardighede besoek het, kon ons dit vermy om tou te staan of kaartjies te koop om in te gaan. By die graf het protokol-offisiere die prosedure aan ons uitgespel: geen pratery, etery of drinkery nie, en onder geen omstandighede foto’s nie. Ons is in stilte by die trappe af na die plek waar Lenin se gebalsemde liggaam gehou word. Niemand het ’n woord gesê nie.

Ons almal het vergeet die president se gehoor was in daardie stadium nie baie goed nie, en hy het waarskynlik nie die protokol-offisier se bevele gehoor nie. Ons was almal stil en het die liggaam van die ontslape kommunisteleier amper bewonder. Dit was spookagtig. En toe, sonder enige waarskuwing, bulder die president: ‘Hoe lank lê hy al hier?’ Die protokol-offisier was uiters geskok en het na ons gekyk asof hy ’n verduideliking of verdere bevele van ons verwag. Watter een van die twee weet ek nie. Ons het nie ’n woord gesê nie, dalk van skok, en die president het sy vraag herhaal, nog harder as die eerste keer, en dit het tot erger konsternasie gelei.

Zenani, sy dogter wat die reis meegemaak het, het toe vir hom gesê: ‘Pa, jy mag nie hier praat nie.’

Hy het teruggefluister, maar nog hard genoeg vir enigeen om te hoor: ‘O, goed, ek is jammer.’

Ons het ook die wêreldberoemde ballet *Swanemeer* in die Bolsjoiteater gaan kyk. Ek was baie beïndruk met die feit dat ek sou

kon sê ek het in die Kremlin oorgebly, Lenin gesien en *Swanemeer* in die Bolsjoi bygewoon. Die feit dat ek daardie geskiedenis saam met Nelson Mandela ervaar het, het dit nog spesialer gemaak. En vir 'n Afrikaner was hierdie iets uiters buitengewoon, aangesien ek soveel tyd in my kinderdae deurgebring het met gebede vir die val van kommunisme in hierdie lande. Tye het voorwaar verander.

Die ballet was alles wat ek my verbeel het dit sou kon wees. Die dans, die dekor, die musiek, alles was briljant. Ek het agter die president gesit en hy wou altyd weet waar ek was ingeval hy enigiets nodig gehad het. Ek het voor die vertoning aan sy skouer geraak en vir hom gesê ek was reg agter hom indien hy water of enigiets anders wou hê. In Rusland is die gewoonte om die letter 'a' of die letters 'ina' agter 'n man se van by te voeg om die vrou van daardie man te identifiseer. Só sou Boris Jeltsin se vrou as Jeltsina bekend staan. Net voor die besoek is ek meegedeel dat daar in Maputo 'n bespreking oor my naam was na aanleiding van name in die Machel-gesin: Gracina, Josina en so aan. Die president het net daar besluit my naam moes verander na Zeldina. In Rusland, met die 'ina'-verskynsel aan die einde van vanne, het hy die gesprek in Maputo onthou en aangehou om my Zeldina te noem. Ons al twee het dit amusant gevind. Die naam het gebly en Madiba het my tot op die einde Zeldina genoem, en nou doen baie mense dit ook. Elke keer as iemand my Zeldina noem, dink ek aan hom.

Die president het nooit besef hoe hard en herkenbaar sy stem is nie. Tussen twee van die balletnommers het hy sy kop in my rigting gedraai en in die stilte van die oomblik nadat die applous uitgedoof het, gesê: 'Zeldina, ek en jy moet daai doen,' en na die verhoog en die ballerinas beduie. Ons almal het uitgebars van die lag en gelukkig dink ek net die Suid-Afrikaners en 'n paar ander mense van ander lande in die gehoor kon verstaan. Dit was skreeusnaaks en ons het minute lank aangehou lag. Gelukkig het die musiek ons gelag uitgedoof, maar hy het sy eie grappie geniet en lank daarna nog geglimlag.

Dit was ook die enigste keer dat ek gesien het dat die president sterk drank drink. Hy het vas geglo 'n mens moet nooit enigiets doen wat jou gasheer aanstoot kan gee nie. Hy het alles gedoen wat van hom verwag word. Die aand van die staatsbanket was hy in 'n diep

gesprek met president Jeltsin. Jeltsin was ’n dramatiese spreker en ek, wat nie geweet het waaroor hulle praat nie, het gedink hulle stry. Intussen het hulle elke nou en dan ’n sluk vodka gevat, of eerder, president Mandela het net ’n teugie gevat. Toe, sonder ’n aankondiging, het president Jeltsin opgespring en uit die kamer gestap. Hy het president Mandela vyftien minute lank by die tafel gelos en dit het my senuweeagtig laat voel. Ek het gedink hulle het beslis gestry en dat hy hom vervies het. Hy het later gesê hy het ’n oproep van president Bill Clinton ontvang wat hy moes neem en tydens sy toespraak het hy om verskoning gevra. Terug in die Kremlin het ek vir die president gesê hoe besorg ek was en hy het gelag omdat ek sou kon dink hy het in ’n woordewisseling met president Jeltsin betrokke geraak. Hy het wel aan president Jeltsin genoem dat hy glo Lenin moes nou na sy graf gaan, maar Jeltsin het vasgestaan dat sy lyk op die Rooiplein moes bly. President Mandela het nie saamgestem nie, maar hulle is op goeie voet uitmekaar.

Van Rusland af is ons Hongarye toe. Ek dink die president was opgewonde omdat sy tyd aan die stuur van sake amper verby was, en die besoek was ontspanne en genotvol. Ons protokol-offisier in Hongarye het omtrent twintig keer vir ons gesê Boedapest, die hoofstad, is eintlik twee aparte stede, Boeda en Pest, met ’n rivier wat in die middel deur loop. Ons het mekaar eintlik daaroor begin terg en vir almal naby ons gevra of hulle geweet het Boedapest is eintlik twee verskillende stede. Selfs die president het elke nou en dan seker gemaak dat ons bewus is van hierdie feit en dit was vir my lekker dat hy met ons saamgespeel het. Sy sin vir humor het hom nooit in die steek gelaat nie.

Van Boedapest af is ons Pakistan toe vir ’n staatsbesoek van twee dae, en daarna na Beijing in China. As ’n mens gedink het jy het in Rusland ’n probleem met kos en om die taal te verstaan, wel, China was erger. Iemand het vir ons gesê alle aktiwiteite by fabrieke is twee dae voor ons besoek gestaak sodat die lugbesoedeling kon lig. Ek weet nie of dit regtig waar was nie, maar ek wou dit graag glo. Ek het weer opgemerk dat alles in Beijing soos ’n masjien gewerk het. Daar was feitlik geen teken van emosie nie en dit het gelyk of mense al hul antwoorde voor die tyd ingeoefen het. ’n Paar lede van die afvaardiging het die Groot Muur besoek, maar ek het gedink dit sou

nie wys wees om president Mandela vir ’n lang tyd alleen te laat nie, veral nie in ’n land waar feitlik niemand Engels praat nie en hy beslis nie ’n enkele woord Mandaryns verstaan het nie. Ons kollegas het baie moeg teruggekom en ek was ’n bietjie spyt dat ek nie die Muur gesien het nie, maar ek het besluit alles was die opoffering werd.

Terug in Suid-Afrika het ons gereed begin maak om die presidensie ná die verkiesing te verlaat. Luciano Pavarotti het ’n optrede in Pretoria gehou wat meneer Mandela en mevrou Machel begewoon het. Dit was vir ons almal baie emosioneel en amper ’n statige manier om die begin van die einde van die termyn in te lei. Die president het uitgesien na sy aftrede. Min het ons geweet hy het daarna uitgesien om minder te doen van die dinge wat hy móés doen en meer van die dinge wat hy wóú doen.

Op 14 Mei het die presidensie ’n afskeidsgeleentheid vir sy hele personeel gehou en die president het dit bygewoon. Dit was ’n wonderlike gedagte en almal het heerlik partytjie gehou. Nadat die president weg is, het die partytjie voortgeduur en ons het tot laat in die nag gedans en almal het vir mekaar totsiens gesê. Teen hierdie tyd het ons baie sterk vriendskapsbande gesmee en ons het ’n suksesvolle termyn en groot prestasies gevier. ’n Mens kan in enige kantooromgewing vriende maak, maar in ’n presidensie is dit asof jy weet daar is ’n beperking op die tyd wat julle saam gaan deurbring en jy word sentimenteel en emosioneel, selfs as dit vir jou voel asof die tyd wat julle saam deurgebring het deur uitdagings gekenmerk is. Jy hou nie noodwendig van almal nie, maar jy bou sterk bande met mense omdat julle in hierdie omgewing ingedwing is waar die druk altyd groot is, en jy leer om saam te leef en om by te dra tot die sukses en nalatenskap van die termyn. In vergelyking met die presidensies wat sou volg het ons ’n baie klein kantoor gehad. Ons was doeltreffend en al het ons soms foute gemaak, het ons die president goed ondersteun in sy fokus op versoening en om nasionale eenheid te bou.

Ons het dag en nag daaraan gewerk om stemme vir die verkiesing te werf en die land platgereis sonder ophou. Die president het dieselfde toespraak keer op keer gelewer, sommer so uit die vuis, oor en oor, tot ek ’n punt bereik het waar ek presies geweet het wat hy volgende sou sê. Dis wanneer jy die pylvak bereik en jy die eindstreep

sien en jy besluit nou gaan jy alles insit tot jy daardie lyn oorsteek. Dit was waar hy hom bevind het en ek was nog so twee rondtes agter hom. Mense het my gereeld gevra hoekom ek dan so moeg is, terwyl die president hierdie vinnige pas kon volhou. Wat hulle nie in aanmerking neem nie, is dat die ondersteuningspersoneel nie hul eie ondersteuningspersoneel gehad het nie. Niemand het brood vir my huis gekoop nie, niemand het my klere gewas of my van punt A na punt B rondgery nie. Ek moes maniere vind om die gewone dingetjies van die lewe in te pas by my werk, waarin ek die helfte van die president se lewe vir hom moes reël. Ek sal nie sê dit was makliker vir hom nie, en hy was meer as twee keer ouer as ek, maar ’n mens onderskat die stres wat die klein dingetjies in jou lewe kan veroorsaak, veral wanneer jy teen daardie tempo werk.

Op 19 Mei het Sy Koninklike Hoogheid kroonprins Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud van Saoedi-Arabië in Suid-Afrika aangekom om totsiens te sê. Sy vliegtuig was veronderstel om seweuur te land, en teen elfuur het ek nog steeds by die lughawe op hom gewag. Die president het my gevra om daar te wees om seker te maak dat alles vlot verloop. Ons het gewag en gewag en ek was geïrriteerd toe die vliegtuig uiteindelik land. Daarna moes ons nog ’n ete bywoon en ek het die president elke nou en dan gebel om hom op hoogte te hou van die tyd wat die prins sou aankom. Hoewel hy moeg was, was hy bereid om te wag en enige tyd van die nag ’n ete by te woon. Teen middernag was die kroonprins en sy gevolg by die presidensie in Pretoria. Hy het meer as vyftig mense saamgebring. Die ete kon begin. Een van my kollegas, Lizanne van Oudshoorn van protokol, was daardie aand ook aan diens. Toe die president opstaan om sy toespraak te lewer, het ek Lizanne gevra om vir my in te staan omdat ek nie meer kon bybly nie. Dit was al amper seweuur en nadat ek die president se toespraak die vorige dag al vier keer gehoor het, het ek besef ek was te moeg om vir die vyfde keer daarna te luister. Ondanks die feit dat hy ook baie moeg moes wees, was hy optimisties oor die verkiesing en die toekoms van Suid-Afrika. Hy het altyd meer energiek geklink wanneer hy oor die nuwe Suid-Afrika se vooruitsigte praat. Die tyd van die dag het hom nie afgeskrik nie en hy het die kroonprins se besoek geniet.

Suid-Afrika se tweede demokratiese verkiesing het op 2 Junie 1999

plaasgevind. President Mandela is na ’n stemlokaal naby sy huis om sy stem uit te bring. Iets wat my altyd geïnteresseer het, is dat niemand ooit belang gestel het wanneer die president iets gedoen het wat nie indrukwekkend of skouspelagtig was nie. Niemand het in sy daaglikse lewe belang gestel nie. Maar die dag van die verkiesing het van die vreemdste mense opgedaag om saam met hom na die stemlokaal te gaan. Min mense het omgegee wat hy as uitdagings beskou het. Dit is duidelik dat baie mense net hulleself wou bevorder en dat dit hul agenda sou bly lank nadat hy afgetree het. Nadat hy gestem het, het die media hom gevra: ‘Vir wie het u gestem, Meneer die President?’ en hy het geantwoord: ‘Vir myself.’ Ek het gedink dis snaaks, hoewel die media of publiek dit dalk verkeerd sou kon interpreteer.

Voor die verkiesing het president Mandela my eendag na sy kantoor ontbied. Hy het gesê ek moet sit en ek het geweet hier kom iets belangrik. Hy het my feitlik nooit so formeel gevra om te gaan sit nie. Maar ’n formele versoek soos dié was anders en sy stemtoon was ernstig. ‘Zeldina, ek wil hê jy moet saam met my aftree.’

My antwoord was: ‘Wel, Khulu, ek is ’n bietjie jonk om af te tree, maar as u bedoel ek moet nog steeds saam met u werk, sal ek natuurlik graag wil.’ Ná vyf jaar het hy my beter geken as enigiemand anders. Hy het my op ’n manier sien grootword en as hy aan die vroeë dae teruggedink het, moes hy lag oor my oningeligtheid en domheid. Maar hy het my vasbeslotenheid, toegewydheid en lojaliteit raakgesien.

Hoewel ons lewens so verskillend was, het ek besef daar is ’n kans dat hierdie mens my nooit sou versaak nie. En Nelson Mandela het my nie laat agterbly nie. Hy het my saam met hom geneem. Dit was duidelik een van die grootste eerbewyse van my lewe, indien nie die heel grootste nie, om deur Madiba gekies te word om hom te dien ná sy aftrede.

Elke president van Suid-Afrika wat aftree word sekere regte toegestaan. Een daarvan was om ’n voltydse sekretaresse te hou waarvoor die presidentskantoor sou betaal, maar dan mag hy net daardie persoon se dienste gebruik. Dit het ook sy telefoonlyn ingesluit en sekere administratiewe ondersteuning soos ’n faksmasjien ensovoorts, basiese dinge en dan ook veiligheid en amptelike motorvervoer binne Suid-Afrika. Dae voor sy aftrede het ons begin

oppak om ons persoonlike besittings in ons kantoor in die Uniegebou te kan saamvat.

Op 11 Junie 1999 het die president die laaste stel geloofsbriewe aan inkomende ambassadeurs oorhandig. Ek het hom dopgehou en gesien hoe hy dit regtig vir die laaste keer geniet. Ek was altyd verbaas oor hoe goed hy die name van ander staatshoofde kon onthou.

Op 13 Junie het die Broeder Leier kolonel Moeammar Ghadaffi van Libië die president kom besoek om totsiens te sê. Sedert die jare negentig was die president betrokke by die proses wat verband gehou het met die hofsaak oor die Lockerbie-vliegongeluk waarin tweehonderd-en-sewentig mense dood is. Eers het meneer Mandela en president George Bush sr. vroeg in daardie dekade ooreengekom dat die hofsaak in 'n neutrale land sou plaasvind. President Bush het meneer Mandela se voorstelle aanvaar, maar die Britse premier, John Major, het geweier. Toe word Tony Blair premier en toe die versoek aan hom gerig is, het hy aanvaar dat die saak ingevolge Skotse wetgewing in Den Haag in Nederland aangehoor sou word. 'n Lang proses het hierop gevolg waartydens meneer Mandela met Ghadaffi onderhandel het om die twee beskuldigdes aan Den Haag uit te lewer, en uiteindelik het prins Bandar van Saoedi-Arabië en professor Jakes Gerwel daarin geslaag om die Broeder Leier te oorreed om die beskuldigdes uit te lewer.

Later in 2002 het ons die Barlinnie-gevangenis in Skotland besoek waar die Libiër Abdelbaset al-Megrahi 'n vonnis van sewe-en-twintig jaar uitgedien het na die hofsaak. Hy het gekla oor die toestande in die tronk en het ons deur Ghadaffi laat weet dat hy met Madiba wou praat. Daar was bitter min wat Ghadaffi self sou kon doen aangesien hy as 'n vyand van die Weste beskou is, al het hy sy belofte nagekom en die twee verdagtes uitgelewer, en al het hy die gesinne van die slagoffers finansieel vir hul verlies vergoed. Ja, geld kan nie 'n lewe terugbring nie, maar Ghadaffi het wel sy belofte gehou, en tog het die Weste nie die sanksies opgeskort soos hulle beloof het nie. Daar was niks wat Madiba kon doen om die Weste te oorreed om die sanksies te beëindig nie. Hy het die feit waardeer dat Ghadaffi sy woord gehou het en hy was bereid om Al-Megrahi se situasie te ondersoek toe hy gevra is om dit te doen.

Toe ons by die tronk instap, omring deur Skotse tronkpersoneel,

was daar ’n swaarmoedigheid in die lug. Ons het Al-Megrahi se sel binnegegaan. Dit het bestaan uit ’n leefarea, ’n badkamer en ’n kombuis. Ek het dit met president Mandela se sel op Robbeneiland vergelyk en gedink dit lyk soos ’n suite. Hy was duidelik diep geraak deur president Mandela se besoek en ons het lank met hom gesels. Hy het bewyse aan ons voorgelê wat hy gevoel het nie in die hof oorweeg is nie en gekla dat hy nie sy Moslemgeloof kon beoefen nie, omdat hy in afsondering opgesluit was en veronderstel was om saam met ander te aanbid. Madiba het mooi en met simpatie geluister, maar dit was duidelik dat hy nie sou probeer om die saak te laat heropen nie. Na die tyd het Madiba ’n groot nuuskonferensie toegespreek. Hy het gevra dat Al-Megrahi na ’n tronk in ’n Moslemland oorgeplaas word. Dis nie toegestaan nie. Al-Megrahi is later na die die Greenock-gevangenis oorgeplaas, waar hy nie in afsondering opgesluit was nie. Hy was later dodelik siek en is vrygelaat, en in 2012 is hy op die ouderdom van sestig in Tripoli dood.

Die Orde van Goeie Hoop, Suid-Afrika se hoogste eerbewys, is aan prins Bandar en professor Gerwel toegeken om hulle te beloon vir hul aandeel in onderhandelings met Ghadaffi om die twee beskuldigdes uitgelewer te kry. Die president het ’n goeie verhouding met Ghadaffi gehad as gevolg van hierdie onderhandelings en Ghadaffi moes weet hy kan Madiba vertrou voordat hy sou saamwerk. Ek dink Madiba het gehou van die feit dat Ghadaffi openlik gesê het hy is nie bang vir die Weste nie. Die Weste het Madiba nie ondersteun tydens die apartheidsjare nie, en tot ’n groot mate hul bande met die apartheidsregering behou as ’n skans teen kommunisme. Dit was dus ’n emosionele dag vir Ghadaffi toe hy president Mandela kom groet het aan die einde van sy presidentskap.

Ons het hom daarna net ’n paar keer gesien. Die laaste keer was tydens president Jacob Zuma se inhuldiging. Ek het hom reguit gevra hoekom hy nie moeite gedoen het om met Madiba kontak te maak nie. Ek het nie ’n antwoord by hom gekry nie en Madiba was geskok toe Ghadaffi in 2011 vermoor is. Niemand verdien om sonder waardigheid dood te gaan nie. Ek kan nie die dinge wat Ghadaffi aan sy eie mense gedoen het goedpraat nie, maar hy was altyd respekvol teenoor Madiba en hy het respek in my oë verdien omdat hy altyd sy beloftes nagekom het tydens daardie samesprekings. Madiba was

lojaal teenoor diegene met wie hy ’n vriendskap gesmee het, en die Broeder Leier was een van hulle. Hy het nooit versuim om te sê wanneer hy gedink het die Broeder Leier maak foute nie, maar hulle het wedersydse respek behou selfs wanneer hulle van mekaar verskil het. Nog een van Madiba se groot lesse: Jy kan tot ’n groot mate met iemand verskil, maar dit beteken nie dat jy hulle nie moet respekteer nie.

Ons het Kaapstad toe gereis waar die nuwe president beëdig sou word, en toe na Pretoria vir president Mbeki se inhuldiging op 16 Junie. By die inhuldiging by die Uniegebou het ek vir die eerste keer enige interaksie tussen mevrou Machel en mevrou Winnie Madikizela-Mandela gesien.

Tot in daardie stadium het ek mevrou Mandela nog net by ’n paar geleenthede op ’n afstand gesien. Ons het geen kontak van enige aard met haar gehad nie. Dit was een van daardie ongeskrewe reëls dat indien jy vir die president werk, vra jy nie vrae oor sy verhouding met sy familie of voormalige vroue nie. Behalwe vir die vier kleinkinders wat saam met die president gewoon het, het ons net nou en dan vir Zindzi en Zenani, sy dogters uit daardie huwelik, gesien. Toe ek sien hoe mevrou Madikizela-Mandela en mevrou Machel na mekaar kyk toe hulle by mekaar verbystap in die skare, het dit my bang gemaak. Daar was geen sprake van ’n platoniese vriendskap tussen die twee vroue nie en ek kon my nie indink dat hulle ooit hoflik teenoor mekaar sou kon wees nie.

Ek het deur die jare ’n waardering vir mevrou Winnie Madikizela-Mandela ontwikkel. Ek was kwaad toe ek verneem het dat sy afsydig was teenoor Madiba na sy vrylating. Almal het gepraat oor haar verhouding met Dali Mpofu. Dit moes Madiba seergemaak het. Dit was mevrou Machel wat my gehelp het om die feit te aanvaar en te waardeer dat Madiba dalk hoop sou opgee as dit nie in daardie lang jare in die tronk vir mevrou Madikizela-Mandela was nie. Benewens die feit dat sy die ma van twee van sy kinders was, het sy ook vir hom as ’n baken van hoop gedien en sy was die mens na wie hy saans verlang het en van wie hy gedroom het, die een aan wie hy sou wou raak en saam met wie hy tyd sou wou deurbring. Ek het haar half begin verstaan en ook geweet hoe eensaam sy moes gewees het sonder hom. Dis eers wanneer ons self eensaamheid ervaar dat ons in andere

die donkerte daarvan kan raaksien en soos ek ouer geword het, was my begrip van hierdie dinge deel van my gedagtes.

Op die dag van president Mbeki se inhuldiging het ons soos gewoonlik wakker geword en die seremonie bygewoon, waarna president Mandela na sy kantoor in die Uniegebou teruggekeer het om sy persoonlike besittings te gaan haal. Die kantoor was verlate omdat dit ’n openbare vakansiedag was. Ek het deur die glasdeure gestap waar ek sy kantoor vyf jaar vroeër vir die eerste keer binnegegaan het en ek het saggies gehuil. Hy het mevrou Machel se hand vasgehou terwyl ons in die gang afgeloop het na sy kantoor. Ek het ’n paar treë voor hulle geloop en al wat hul aankoms verklap het, was die klank van die veiligheidsdeur wat voor hulle oopgemaak en toe weer outomaties agter hulle toegeskuif het. Ons kantore het klaar leeggestaan en ek het hulle alleen in sy kantoor laat agterbly terwyl hulle die laaste paar goedjies in sy laaie en badkamer ingepak het. Ek het vir hulle ’n klein boksie gevat waarin hy hierdie goedjies kon pak en hy het gesien ek huil. Hy het na my gekyk en gesê: ‘Zeldina, jy oorreageer.’ Dis presies dieselfde woorde wat hy gebruik het toe ek hom in 1994 ontmoet het. Hy het dit destyds onder ander omstandighede gesê en ek het nou om presies die teenoorgestelde redes gehuil. In 1994 het ek gehuil uit ’n skuldgevoel en uit vrees vir wat voorlê, en nou het ek gehuil omdat alles verby was. Min het ek geweet wat alles nog voorlê.

PART THREE

Gatekeeper to the Most Famous Man in the World

1999–2008

7

Travel and Conflict

We had made plans to set up office in the President's old house in Houghton. By now he had moved to a new house following his marriage with Mrs Machel in 1998. His old house was a large double-storey house that, despite being his home for over five years, was run down and not well decorated. It was empty though and I knew it would be a good place to set up the office because it was close to his new residence too. I also asked Madiba if I could stay there while I found a place to live in Johannesburg.

At first he wanted me to come and stay on his premises but I turned down the offer, knowing too well that I needed the distance and that it would not be welcomed by all of his family. I arranged for my furniture arriving from Cape Town to be delivered at the old house in Houghton.

I started cleaning the only bedroom upstairs that was liveable – Madiba's old bedroom, which was painted in the ugliest shade of blue one can imagine. I don't think such things ever bothered him. Everything was blue and even though I loved blue it was too blue. It was a modest room, definitely not befitting for a President, and I was happy that Mrs Machel's presence in his life had both enlightened his life but also introduced him to a few more materialistic pleasures, like a bigger room and a dignified space to live in to appreciate the sunlight through your bedroom window, and a room that welcomes you as opposed to depressing you. Still in comparison to the luxuries others with similar positions enjoy, his remained modest.

I called the Ministry of Public Works and asked them to send an official to look at obtaining furniture for Madiba's office, in accordance with government policy. They agreed. They also agreed to

speed up the installation of a telephone and fax machine as soon as possible.

In the days to follow I unpacked and settled and started what would effectively be known as our post-Presidential office – the Nelson Mandela Foundation, from where he would continue his public service. Prof. Gerwal drafted an outline of what the office had to focus on and the Foundation's trust deed provided for him to further his ambitions to build schools and clinics, fight the AIDS epidemic, provide a space for dialogue and a physical building to host his writings and memorabilia. Chaos ensued and soon the entire world was looking for President Mandela, trying and pushing to get him to attend to their causes. I didn't know how we were going to pay for them but I had to hire help as I simply couldn't manage by myself. Prof. Gerwal visited regularly and asked one of our former colleagues, Loïs Dippenaar, to help put order in the chaos. One after the other I convinced Lydia Baylis, Maretha Slabbert and Jackie Maggot to join our office temporarily, although the arrangement ended up lasting for many years.

They would sometimes leave me in the afternoon behind my desk when they went home and find me there the next morning. Some nights I didn't sleep and simply read letters and typed responses throughout the night to be faxed the next morning. My argument was, the quicker we were able to respond, the less people were going to call to follow up on requests, so I was trying to bring down the volume of telephone calls so the pressure would be less. Many times I wanted to give up and leave but I never could. On many occasions I wondered what drove a person to make him/her pick up the telephone or a pen to contact Nelson Mandela. It was all just too much and I was at the brim of my frustration levels, more or less something that had become the norm.

I would only go upstairs and shower at around 7 a.m. in the morning before the other staff arrived back at work, and then continued the day without any sleep. After about three days in a row I would crash for an entire day and then start again.

Soon Madiba started coming into the office more regularly, and in the first few days of conducting appointments in his post-Presidential office he reminded visitors who referred to him as 'President' that he was now retired and no longer wanted to be called 'President'. He wanted to be called either Madiba or Mr Mandela.

Since I called him Khulu, there was adjustment for me only in the

way I spoke of him and not to him. I now had to learn to speak of Madiba or Mr Mandela and not the President when I spoke of him. He would often ask people when they called him Mr President, 'Where were you when I retired?' so word spread and it eventually stopped. He also didn't want to be awarded titles like Honourable, etc. He was content with Mr Mandela or Madiba and told people on endless occasions: 'Just call me Madiba.' He said a title doesn't change the person that you are, and that was his way of telling us that he didn't have to be given titles – even though by the last count he had been awarded 1,177 tributes, of which 697 were awards of some kind and over 120 were honorary doctorates. When people wanted to address him using the honorary doctorate titles he was fast to explain to them that he didn't study for any of those doctorates and that they were merely honorary titles.

In late 1999 I received a letter from the Presidency promoting me to the post of Assistant Director in the Office of the President. Even though I was still seconded to Madiba, the higher rank could be allocated as a result of the availability of posts within the structures of the Presidency.

It was clear that the Foundation was going to need funding. To run the office we started off by borrowing money with the only surety being the words from Madiba and Prof. Gerwel that 'We will repay it as soon as possible, please don't charge us interest.' Madiba was still an icon to the world, but unlike in other countries former Presidents do not receive funding from the government to allow the person to continue his public life. Yet in our case, the world had the same expectations of him regardless of his official position.

It was clear that Madiba, too, expected things to continue as before. He woke up the morning of his retirement as if nothing had changed. He was as determined as before to bring about change in South Africa, to reform society until it was free from discrimination of any kind. He called to issue a few instructions and when I dropped the call I panicked, not knowing how I would manage to arrange all the things he had expected of me. He did the same with Professor Gerwel, who jokingly told Madiba that he no longer worked for him. Prof. Gerwel was going to serve as Chair of the board of the Nelson Mandela Foundation and even though I was still employed by the state I had no idea how to make things happen without any infrastructure. Yet, Madiba knew how to drive me beyond my limits. I did not recognize or trust that I had the ability to continue with

business as usual despite our entire infrastructure disintegrating overnight. He did. He patiently guided me and I am fortunate to have learned from such a great mentor and teacher.

Even so, in August 1999 Madiba said that he was tired and they needed a holiday. That was a challenge. Where do we go? How do we get there? It suddenly dawned on me that we had lost the luxury of the private plane and that it would cost us over R1 million (today about US$100,000) to travel to the US in a private plane. We didn't have that kind of money and Madiba would never agree to such expenditure on a holiday. He and Mrs Machel had been invited to the Bahamas by Tony O'Reilly, former owner of Heinz and at the time the owner of Independent News and Media, and his wife Chryss to stay at their house in Nassau. They would take care of us once we got there but I had no idea how we would get there. I was panicking.

Madiba couldn't go in a small plane as he needed proper sleep and he needed to be able to stand up straight without having to bend his injured knee, and to be able to use ablution facilities on a plane. He had a problem with his knee as a result of a Robben Island injury and as he aged it got worse. He had difficulty climbing stairs and couldn't manage more than just a few steps at a time.

I called Tokyo Sexwale, one of South Africa's richest businessmen and an old comrade of Madiba's and whom I knew had connections to people with private planes. He put me on to a few people but none of them could help us. I asked all the wealthy people in South Africa with private planes, the Oppenheimers, the Ruperts and even called up Michael Jackson abroad to ask if we could borrow his plane. None of the planes were available as they were all chartered out or being used by their owners at the time. The only solution in the end was using a commercial scheduled flight. I don't know how we did it, but we managed. As time went by we perfected the art of commercial travelling with Madiba. As long as first class provided a proper flat bed for him to sleep in and the airport had the facilities of a passenger assistance unit that could elevate him to the level of the plane, avoiding the climbing of any steps, we could fly commercially. We just had to keep passengers and crew at bay and avoid him having to sign menus and other items throughout the flight. It was a nightmare at first.

So we set off to the Bahamas on holiday, our first holiday in five years. Madiba, Mrs Machel, Josina Machel (Mrs Machel's daughter), me, security and a doctor. We were all nervous but it all worked out

well. We transferred in Atlanta and went on to Nassau. One had to find a way of both accommodating Madiba's needs but also taking facilities at airports and their supporting staff capabilities into account. It was negotiating and compromising all the time. At every airport, disembarking after long flights, people wanted to take photographs with him or ask for autographs. After a sixteen-hour flight an eighty-one-year-old just shouldn't be asked to have photographs taken or sign autographs. He needed space to breathe and to regain strength at every opportunity, and although one didn't want to be nasty to people I would go to great lengths to explain that he was elderly and needed space and shouldn't be bothered with autographs. In most instances people understood although the die-hards always persisted.

* * *

After the Bahamas trip we travelled the world trying to raise funds for the newly established Nelson Mandela Foundation. In Germany Madiba met with the Chancellor of the time Gerhard Schröder to ask for support for our Foundation. From Germany we went to Tunis to see President Ben Ali to also ask him for support. He had the most beautiful palace decorated in the finest mosaics.

From Tunis we went to Tripoli to visit the Brother Leader Gaddafi and ask for his support for the Foundation. The leaders from the West turned a blind eye to Madiba's association with Gaddafi. It was always entertaining to see the Brother Leader. One waited for days and days to receive word from him and then suddenly everyone had to jump and move to where he was hiding, sometimes in the desert, always fearing surprise attacks by the West in retaliation of the Lockerbie bombing. On this particular visit he invited us to dinner, and during our audience with him in the afternoon he asked what he could have prepared for us that night. By then I had been with Madiba when he had seen the Brother Leader on a few occasions and your face becomes familiar. He treated me with great respect and made me feel at home.

Earlier in the afternoon Madiba and I had a discussion about camel meat as we drove past camels and, when asked by the Brother Leader what we wanted for dinner, Madiba felt it was appropriate to ask for camel meat. 'Of course,' the Brother Leader responded. (He never wanted to be called President as he felt it was an invention by

the Westerners which he refused to accept. To the end, we referred to him as the Brother Leader.) The camel meat tasted exactly like lamb. I was later told that they had to slaughter baby camels as the meat became tough the older the camel grew. I was not going to encourage the slaughter of baby animals so I never wanted to eat camel again. But it was a rare occasion that a head of state would ask Madiba what he wanted for dinner and I quite liked that Gaddafi was so considerate. Conversations were limited to pleasantries and a general view on whatever was happening in the world at the time. They always dwelled back to Lockerbie and the Brother Leader's unhappiness with the West for not delivering on its promises to lift all sanctions. And whenever Madiba travelled to the US, it would be a point of discussion there too.

* * *

Back home we were soon in the swing of things and attending to business as usual. We would attend a South African Chamber of Business and National African Chamber of Commerce dinner the one day, and the next take the Afrikaans Trade Institute to rebuild a school in Qunu. Prof. Gerwel remained our anchor and adviser on everything we agreed to. He remained central to our decision-making process. We were also attending farewell functions, although it wasn't clear where we were going because business was continuing as usual. One such function was the welcoming ceremony hosted by the Qunu community and King Dalindyebo, the King of the Thembus of which Madiba was a clan member. They were hoping that Madiba would return to Qunu in retirement but we realized that even there he would never retire fully, as people would constantly approach him with their problems, considering him as the solver of all their tribulations no matter how mundane – from arguing about someone who stole his neighbour's chicken to serious traditional affairs and differences between the respective clans. Madiba was never overly traditional but he respected the tradition and culture of his clan.

We would welcome visits by groups of children from the organization Reach for a Dream when terminally ill children expressed their last wish as being to meet Madiba, have luncheons and dinners with old friends and comrades, fundraise for schools and clinics and even for the Bushbucks soccer team, the regional team that represented the area where Madiba came from. They weren't doing

too well in the soccer league but he nevertheless felt obliged to help them because they were his ‘home team’. He would see families of late warders, attend his grandchildren’s graduation ceremonies, and in between try and find time to spend with Mrs Machel. He could fly to Botswana to receive an honorary doctorate and back at home that evening have dinner with Helen Suzman, his long-time supporter and friend from the Progressive Federal Party, now sadly departed. The pace was never a consideration to him. He wanted to continue doing as much as possible and squeeze a twenty-six-hour programme into a twenty-four-hour day.

A month later we were on our way abroad again. While we had the full support of a Foreign Affairs department before and the backing of diplomatic services, I now had to deal with negotiations from programmes to VIP rooms at airports to courtesy cars from foreign governments to accommodation needs etc., all by myself, in addition to asking for meetings with presidents, heads of state and people of importance. While at home in Johannesburg I started preparing for the next trip abroad. I also think Madiba just loved travelling, so he accepted invitations for no good enough reason and invented visits because he was determined to fundraise for the Foundation now. He looked for opportunity in everything.

If I ever thought of saying ‘I’m sending someone else with you’, the suggestion would be met with hostility. Not because of favouritism but only because he trusted that I would know what to do in any situation he would find himself in. I was not scared to tell a minister or a senior official when to stop as I could read his face and the unspoken gestures became easy to read. I constantly had to fend off media requests while abroad and my defence mechanisms were in overdrive. I was playing the role of that actress I’d wanted to become; doing things I could never do for anyone else but the position and the person in question required it.

Madiba called Prof. and told him about his intentions to visit the Middle East. They had discussed this for a while and strategized about the countries to be visited and what agenda to push for. As much as Madiba was our true north, Prof. was Madiba’s true north politically and when it came to planning any strategy. Madiba admired Prof.’s intellect and insight apart from the fact that he considered and treated Prof. more like a son.

Our first stop was in Iran. I covered myself out of respect for the Muslim culture and kept my distance as far as possible. We then set

off to dinner at the residence of President Khatami. As we entered his residence, a complete palace as one would expect, I fended off some photographers who used flashes while photographing Madiba. It is a known fact worldwide that Madiba's eyes were sensitive as a result of the bright reflection in the quarry where he'd had to dig out limestone on Robben Island for most of the eighteen years of imprisonment on the island. When his eyes were exposed to too much flash light they became red and teary to the extent where he had to wear sunglasses, even indoors and at night. We were all very protective over his eyes and therefore knew to fight off any photographers, with authority. So, of course, I assumed that position even though I was the only woman in sight, fending off the photographers.

President Khatami saw me fighting off the photographers but after Madiba entered his residence I kept to the back of the delegation so as to not offend anyone sensitive to the presence of women and left them to go upstairs alone for dinner. There were no other females present in President Khatami's residence. After about ten minutes at table and our food being served already, I got called by a panic-struck butler to follow him upstairs to where the President and Madiba were seated. I thought Madiba had purely called me as he usually would to introduce me, which he did, but then he said that President Khatami insisted that I sat at their table. I was extremely uncomfortable and didn't know how to behave; it was similar to how I felt being seated next to Queen Noor in 1995. The only difference was we were the only three people in the room this time and I was exposed to the scrutiny of two politicians: a serving and a former president.

President Khatami kept on asking me questions about my upbringing and the Afrikaans culture, almost as if Madiba wasn't even there. I kept on referring questions back to Madiba but Madiba was determined to let me answer and he peacefully enjoyed his meal, just nodding occasionally giving his approval to what I was saying, or then saying, 'Zeldina, what do you think?' To try and stop the enquiry launched at me, I thought of saying, 'Well, I actually just don't think anything,' but that was impossible to conceive. That must have been the least Madiba spoke during any dinner ever.

I remember from our state visit to France in 1995 I was intrigued that presidents could discuss the prices of import and export items, limited to oranges and bananas, and how many Boeings South Africa was willing to order from France, but here in Iran the entire conversation was limited to the Afrikaans culture. Madiba thoroughly

enjoyed the grilling I was getting and only now and then would he come to my rescue with a supportive smile. For years after he would remind people of my importance, of course jokingly, teasing me by reciting this story, telling people that the President of Iran insisted on inviting me to his table, and I would respond by saying that Madiba merely wanted to enjoy his food and therefore put me on the spot that night. Such was the teasing and joking with Madiba; always a story and a moment to remember.

I had to ensure, when drafting programmes for visits like these, that we were seen to do the politically correct thing. We would have to include a wreath-laying ceremony at the memorial site of the late Ayatollah Khomeini. As a youngster I remember a prayer for the people 'behind the iron curtain' and when asked what the iron curtain was, reference was made to the people who lived under the oppression of the Ayatollah Khomeini or the communist regimes. Now I was arranging wreath-laying ceremonies at the Ayatollah's grave. Then we would visit former President, Ayatollah Rafsanjani, as well as His Eminence Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran. As I was the only female at all these events the Supreme Leader noticed me amid a full room of photographers taking pictures of the two eminent people sitting together. The Ayatollah asked out loud: 'Who is that young lady at the back?' Madiba, knowing that I was the only woman in the room, answered excitedly, knowing that he would embarrass me and of course without even looking at me, 'Oh that's Zeldina. My secretary.'

I wanted Madiba to make eye contact with me so I could signal him with my eyes 'don't call me, please'. But he also knew when to ignore me because he knew I would be signalling to please not embarrass me. He avoided eye contact. I felt out of place but took the Ayatollah's instructions to sit next to Madiba, closer, where he could see me. Somehow my presence amused these people and they were intrigued by me, possibly not knowing what to make of a white lady being with the famous black freedom fighter.

I didn't bother about who I considered to be politically right or wrong in any discussion or who seemed progressive in their ideals; I was purely concerned and obsessed with the next five minutes, followed by the next twenty-four hours of Madiba's life, making sure that everything was organized for him in a way that would make life easier for him. Although my general understanding of the world improved I didn't have the space to absorb or understand the

intricacies of these countries we visited.

From Iran we went to Damascus in Syria where we met the elderly President Assad. This was only a few years before he passed away. We also met his son who was an impressive young man at the time. The young President Assad clearly also overstayed his welcome and right now he is being challenged by rebels in his own country to force him to step down from the Presidency. Madiba would often say, when referring to people who served in such positions for too long, that 'leaders got drunk with power', and often when a head of state is being challenged like this, I think of those words, whether they apply to his situation or not.

From Syria we flew to Israel, via Jordan. Due to the strains between Syria and Israel we were not allowed to leave Syria and fly straight into Israel. Whenever I shared my frustrations with Madiba about these political difficulties we faced, trying to do the right thing, he would always say to me: 'No Zeldina, you see they just make life interesting', trying to encourage me to bear up. But sadly, in that moment, they were not so interesting to me.

Upon arrival in Israel we were rushed to our cars like sheep through a crush pen by Israeli police. They nearly left me and Charles (the doctor) behind. I was irritated by the way they handled us and this was one of the many times I had to try and justify my position and why the doctor and I had to be close to Madiba in such a way that they didn't think it was only because we simply wanted to be close to him. That was the challenge of travelling without a delegation, just me and the doctor and security. You had to fight your way open on the spot. There was never any back-up plan and your only concern was for Madiba: you thought of yourself and the rest when you were already in the situation. I am not a confrontational person in my private life but in situations like these I became another person, playing the actress I'd wanted to be trying to defend us all.

We stayed at the King David Hotel, and on the first night I ordered meat for Madiba's dinner and salad with cheese for myself from room service. Shortly after I put in the order a butler rang my doorbell. 'Madam,' he told me, 'we wanted to come and explain to you that this is a Kosher hotel and that you cannot have cheese and meat in the same room. You are not allowed.' I really didn't have the capacity to argue about food too. I lost the battle and sat with Madiba during dinner and then went to my room to have my cheese salad. The next morning we visited the grave of Yitzhak Rabin, the person who was

believed could have negotiated a settlement between Israel and Palestine had it not been for his assassination. From there we visited President Weizman and then Prime Minister Ehud Barak. I liked President Weizman. Prime Minister Barak appeared somewhat intolerant of Madiba and I didn't enjoy their interaction.

We walked on the Via Dolorosa in the Old City of Jerusalem. It was touching for me as a Christian when I was told that Jesus carried the cross along this road. They made a huge fuss over Madiba walking the Via Dolorosa and hardly allowed him enough space to comfortably walk on the cobbles. We were all nervous as he could trip on the cobbles with his problematic knee and then injure it badly. He was already unstable on his feet. I touched the ancient cobbles and then asked our guide once again, 'So you mean that Jesus walked on these exact cobbles?' 'No,' he responded. There are apparently around seventeen storeys of building on top of the original road, but this is more or less the road he followed. I was very disappointed.

We then went to the Holocaust museum. One leaves it feeling traumatized and deeply disturbed. As we exited the museum a microphone was pushed in front of Madiba's face and his impressions of the museum were asked for, despite me explaining to journalists outside that he was not prepared to answer questions. He never liked to be pushed into a corner and he was irritated by any surprise factors. His response was simple: 'This is a tragedy that happened to the Jewish nation, but one should never lose sight of the fact that this burden is carried by the German people too. The current generation of Germans suffer to rid the stigma they have had to carry as a result of these events for which they themselves cannot be held accountable at this time and age.' These comments were not appreciated by the Israelis. I sensed some hostility and I was uneasy. (When we arrived back home Madiba had received several letters of complaint from Jewish friends from as far as America about these comments.)

We had a meeting the next day with the President and Prime Minister. They discussed politics and Madiba stuck to his guns around a solution to the Middle Eastern conflict. These conditions had to be adhered to by both parties before any settlement could be reached: 1. Israel had to acknowledge Palestine as an independent country. 2. Palestine had to acknowledge Israel within its clearly defined borders. 3. Parties had to identify a mediator that would be trusted by both. Madiba repeated this over and over again but it fell on deaf ears. There was no chemistry between Madiba and Ehud Barak or the

Minister of Foreign Affairs, David Levy. President Weizman was older, however, and a bit more lenient and less aggressive in his response to these suggestions.

From Israel we went to Palestine and met with Yassar Arafat, whom we had encounters with on a number of previous occasions. He was very respectful towards Madiba but by now I was getting irritated by people's general feeling of victimization in the region. Everyone was a victim and I decided that that was half of the problem in the region for me. People should start feeling pride and dignity regardless of the past. The Palestinians were as unreasonable in their approach in solving the Middle Eastern conflict as were the Israelis.

While Madiba explained to me that the current conflict was started back in 1967 during the Six Day War (when Israel captured and occupied the Golan Heights, West Bank and Gaza Strip) I could clearly see myself that it had escalated to levels to which we won't see solutions in our generation. To me it visually presented a worse picture than apartheid. Families living 500 metres apart have not been able to visit one another in over thirty years, separated by barbed wire. Wherever there was a blade of green grass it was declared Israeli ground and protected by heavily armed guards. Wherever there was nothing, it was declared Palestinian ground. I found it difficult to understand but, with credit to the Israelis, it was clearly beyond a reasonable fight. The Palestinians lack the leadership to come to a resolve. They tried to compare their situation with that of South Africa but people were generally being extremely unreasonable in their thinking.

Madiba was scheduled to address the Palestinian parliament on the day before our departure. Prof. Gerwel edited the speech back in South Africa and emailed the new version to me. I didn't have time to read it and somehow a virus of some sort crept into the computer program. The last sentence of the speech ended with a mathematical formula. Madiba also didn't read the final edits and as a result he read out the maths at the end of the speech. It was in letters and, although I cannot remember the exact words, it was something like: 'For every two equals four minus seven times eight. I thank you.' We were all puzzled but after his speech the entire Palestinian parliament rose to their feet in resounding applause. The speech was translated simultaneously and either the translator didn't translate the maths formula or translated it into something profound. We were all surprised by the occurrence of this virus but amused by the fact that

no one picked up on it. Prof. and I had many laughs about this incident for years to follow. The right thing would have been for us to proofread the speech prior to Madiba delivering it, but that was one of the disadvantages of travelling with a non-existent delegation and working at the pace and pressure we were subjected to.

* * *

From the Middle East, we travelled to Washington to meet with President Clinton. He was still in office and it was the first time I entered the White House. President Clinton was his charming self to Madiba, respectful and relaxed. He listened to Madiba's assessment of the Middle East and generally agreed with his suggestions. He was determined to try and help find a solution to the conflict. In our minds President Clinton was the right person to spearhead a peace process there as he had the trust of both parties. Or so we thought.

On the night of our stay in Washington we stayed in the Watergate Hotel. I felt weird as it was the Watergate scandal that saw the end of the Nixon era and I also believed that Monica Lewinsky, the woman who gambled with the future of the Clinton administration, also stayed in the Watergate apartments.

We had dinner with Madiba's old friend Morgan Freeman and the next day we set off to Dallas in Texas with Prince Bandar. The Prince had bought the Dallas Cowboys football team and we attended a real American football game with him. What an experience, but it was a chaotic day to say the least and it felt like every American in the stadium wanted to shake hands with Madiba. The following day Prince Bandar took us to a proper Texan café where we had tacos and tortillas, something Madiba had never eaten before and I am sure if questioned about it afterwards he would not have remembered what it was. It was very strange to him. What we ate and such traditions never appealed to him like they appealed to me. He liked his simple Xhosa home-cooked food. He was more interested in Prince Bandar's company and conversing with him, discussing the world's problems and probably on a few occasions successfully concluding how to bring about world peace.

From there we travelled to Atlanta to do a CNN interview, and from Atlanta we travelled to Houston to address the university. Our schedule was tight but Madiba loved every minute of it. He would never agree on doing something if he didn't feel up to it, and if there

was an open space in his diary he had to find a cause to fill it. Security was tight on this visit because of Prince Bandar's involvement and this was probably the closest I ever came to assaulting a bodyguard. As we arrived at the university the car in which the doctor and I were travelling got cut off by security guards. We tried to tell our driver to insist on passing through the same entrance as Madiba's car, but he adhered to the traffic police instructions. As a result, Charles and I had to get out of the car and start making our way to Madiba. It was about a 600-metre walk. While we didn't mind the distance we did mind Madiba disappearing somewhere where we were not able to find him again.

Charles had his heavy medical bags to carry and I had my flaming temper and we walked at a fast pace. As we approached the building we could see that Madiba had already entered with Prince Bandar. A bald-headed, massive American bodyguard stopped us; we told him that we needed access as we were part of Mr Mandela's delegation. He point blank refused. He didn't give an explanation nor was prepared to listen to an argument; he just said 'no'. Charles kept me calm and said wisely that eventually Madiba would look for us. As if he knew, the next minute Madiba appeared in the door again. He had come outside to look for us – something very unusual for a person of his stature. Ironically, the black man came to look for his two white servants, to rescue us. We could see him standing on the steps and he could see us, but the bodyguard was facing us and refused to turn his back on us to see for himself that Nelson Mandela was standing on the steps of the building calling us.

I was tempted to plant a flat open hand on his bald head when Prince Bandar's bodyguard, Neigfh, came running towards us to 'rescue' us. Due to previous interactions with Prince Bandar we knew Neigfh and he was an extremely kind gentleman. I turned round to the bodyguard and said: 'Are you happy now? Did it take Nelson Mandela to come outside to come and fetch us? You can bloody well hear we don't have an American accent. You can see the doctor has medical equipment . . .' I guess looking back at events today, he was just doing his job and I was being unreasonable, but sometimes people are just not open to persuasion or then even attempting to find out whether there may be any truth to your story.

People would always comment on the unlikely event of Madiba appointing a white fiery Afrikaner as his assistant, and Prof. would say, 'She has a good healthy mind', and Madiba would add, 'with logic

and simplicity'.

I was feeling responsible for Madiba's well-being and I got the sense that he knew it, always enquiring where we were and looking out for us. Our presence made him feel secure in a way as he knew we would deflect any surprises or challenges. It was a professional co-dependency. We equally felt insecure not knowing where the other one was.

Because of all our travels together Charles and I had become close friends and, being the same age, we could relate well during our experiences in this world unknown to anyone else. Like many of the other doctors Charles deeply cared for Madiba too but people would jokingly refer to him as my slave. Madiba only once or twice fell ill during all our travels abroad and Charles was therefore on stand-by most of the time, not having much to do himself. We worked well together as a team and I would often ask him to do small things, like help to fetch laundry, or search for a newspaper or check up on a room service order for Madiba, wrapping a gift, finding a printer, etc., and from there his title as my slave was born. We had much teasing about it.

I sometimes didn't have time to unpack myself, or as soon as I sat down to make a telephone call back home there would be a foreign protocol person or hotel staff knocking at my door – President Mandela this and President Mandela that. I was the only point of contact in our delegation, for everything, and Charles sometimes had to man my door to enable me to just finish one thing at a time. The pressure was relentless. It sometimes felt like I was going crazy not being able to deal with the pressure but then people like Charles eased the pressure by helping with the mundane issues. He was the only other semi-permanent fixture to our team. Doctors rotated to travel with us too, but because of our hectic travel schedule not all of them wanted to sacrifice their medical day-to-day practices to accompany us. Our security teams also rotated and it was not often that the same team accompanied us on consecutive trips abroad. And when you spend that much time with someone it starts feeling like family.

We were very tired when we returned to South Africa but had the luxury of Prince Bandar's plane in which we all had proper beds to sleep on. It was always a big spoil to be hosted by him as he spared no expense to ensure that we had the best food and service possible. He was a gracious host, very tolerant of Madiba's age, and he had great respect for Madiba as a person, something which I in turn appreciated

and valued.

Returning home, Madiba called a few influential Jewish people, such as Elie Wiesel, in the United States, warning them about the risks they were facing in that prominent American Jewish leaders were clearly agitating for America to take sides with Israel. Hoping then to bring about peace in the region was not going to happen as long as the mediator clearly took sides.

We heard that President Mbeki was not happy with Madiba's visit to the Middle East. Our visit there interfered with the South African government's diplomatic agenda. It is one of those situations where you are doomed if you do and doomed if you don't. Madiba wanted to try to help along the Middle East peace process and was continually asked to lend a hand, but in the end it seemed that sensitivities with the South African government prevailed. Thinking back it was also not the right thing to do for him to jump on a plane and try and resolve the Middle East war. Prof. Gerwel had to intervene, like on so many occasions, to neutralize the situation. It was clear that the external pressures from people were going to cause a lot of conflict for us in South Africa but ultimately Madiba's loyalty to his friends is what caused us to be in such situations.

* * *

On 6 November 1999 Nelson Mandela nearly died. Along with his team.

We were in Postmasburg, a small town in the Northern Cape. It was mid-summer and it was extremely hot. Gauteng (where Johannesburg and Pretoria are found) has a summer rainfall and the area is known for its intense thunderstorms in the midsummer afternoons. Despite trying to finish our work on the ground early, we took off later than we would have liked. We were travelling to Waterkloof, the military airforce base in Pretoria, on a King Air, a twin-propeller light aircraft. It was an ongoing battle to try and persuade the government to allow Madiba to use jet aircraft and they were running out of aircraft due to the busy schedules of President Mbeki and his deputy. Madiba was no longer priority but on this particular day a bigger plane could not be used because of the length of the landing strip in Postmasburg.

About thirty minutes before landing back in Pretoria the pilot turned around and called me to the cockpit. He told me that both

Waterkloof and Johannesburg International airports had been closed as a result of thunderstorms and that we might have to go and land elsewhere. I relayed the message to Madiba. He sat calmly, strapped in his seat watching the every move of the pilots. Soon we started hitting turbulence and the atmosphere in the plane was becoming tense. From where I was seated I could both see Madiba's face and hear the pilots' communication. It was growing urgent as the pilot was informing the control tower that we were not able to circle for much longer since we were running out of fuel and that they were being forced to decide where to land. All neighbouring airports were closed. As we dived through the clouds the turbulence was getting worse and at intervals the pilot had to let go of the steering column of the plane completely to allow the plane to be guided by turbulence. It was terrifying.

Madiba had a frown fixed on his forehead and was pouting his lips in dissatisfaction and Wayne Hendricks, one of the bodyguards, made a few jokes to try and ease the tension. At first he was funny but then I started getting angry at him out of panic. Wayne always had a charming and funny way to ease tension with his sense of humour and under the circumstances, even though he failed dismally, it was nice that he tried.

Madiba didn't say a word. One of Madiba's grandsons, who was also on the plane, looked half-sick when we hit an air pocket which threw the plane a few metres down. The contents of my handbag flew across the plane and we were holding on for dear life. The grandson's cellphone flew from the top pocket of his shirt across the plane and Wayne caught it mid-air in the front like bodyguards do. I could hear the pilots panicking but they were determined to try and land the aircraft at Waterkloof. Emergency services were being called on standby at the airport and by now tears were streaming down my face uncontrollably. I was crying reprehensively. Wayne was comforting me, trying to tell me that we were going to be OK but I couldn't see us emerging from this alive. At last we landed. The pilots were perspiring as they brought the plane to a standstill on the ground. Madiba put his hand on my shoulder and said: 'Don't worry Zeldina, we are safe now.' We disembarked, got into our cars and proceeded to Houghton.

I immediately left to go home but as I drove around the block I got a call from Xoliswa, Madiba's long-serving chef at the house, saying that Madiba wanted me to return to have coffee with him. I returned and he called me into the lounge. His grandson was still sitting with him. Madiba made me sit down and he could see I was visibly still in

shock. He said: ‘Zeldina, today was a terrible experience. But we should forget about it as soon as possible and the best thing for us would be to get on to a plane again as quickly as possible.’ He was comparing it to like falling off a bike. The best you can do is to get back on again as soon as possible. He continued: ‘I never want to fly in a small aircraft like that again and I never want to travel with any of my grandchildren again.’ What he implied was that it was too risky for him to fly in a propeller aircraft and if anything ever happened to him he didn’t want to risk his grandchildren’s lives as well. From that day we refused for him to travel in propeller aircraft again. It created a lot of trouble for us with the airforce as they did not have a large fleet of jet-engine aircraft and they often had to charter. It contributed to the strained atmosphere between us and the Presidency but it was not something I was willing to compromise on after this experience.

Years later we were also in a helicopter incident. Madiba travelled to a rural area in the Transkei on one of our schools and clinics building visits and on our way there the pilots had expressed their concern over something in the engine overheating. They were convinced though that they would be able to fix it once they landed and they were not overly concerned. They thought they had managed to fix it but we were nervous before our return. We told our security on the ground about our concern, and as soon as we took off again after the event they left by road for the direction of Mthatha, where we were heading. About fifteen minutes into the flight oil sprayed all over the outside of the windows. We could no longer see through the window and you could clearly see it was oil spill, which obviously created a fire hazard. The pilots told us that we had to land and they slowly manoeuvered the Oryx helicopter to the ground.

They landed in a piece of open velt and, since the entire region was rural, there were no houses or people in sight. While we landed I called the security men on their way to the airport to tell them that we had had to do an emergency landing. We didn’t land too far from the road and if they approached us they would see us in the velt. They arrived about twenty minutes later, but before they arrived I was concerned about our presence in the region, with the community not knowing why a military helicopter with heavily armed bodyguards outside it had landed in the middle of nowhere. The pilots tried to find the problem but they were unable to fix it. We subsequently got into the cars and drove to Mthatha where our flight back to Johannesburg departed from. Madiba was inclined to think that there

may have been deliberate sabotage involved but I managed to convince him otherwise.

* * *

Huge parties were being planned around the world for the turning of the millennium and South Africa was bracing itself for the same celebrations. By now tension appeared to be growing between Madiba and President Mbeki. We heard rumours that the President seemed to be of the opinion that Madiba was conducting himself like a head of state. Madiba was doing what he always did – responding to ad hoc requests and trying to please everyone possible. Even though we sometimes disagreed with such decisions, he was the captain of his fate, the master of his soul (as he recited the poem 'Invictus' from his prison years) and he wanted to continue what pleased his soul. It was very difficult to focus on what we had hoped his post-Presidential office and its focus would be. Then there was always the feeling of entitlement from people across the world. They felt entitled to him in a way because some of them supported the struggle against apartheid and they expected him to do certain things, and he would eagerly oblige also feeling the need to repay dues. Secretly I think he also just loved travelling, and having been incarcerated for such a long time I do think that it was normal for him to want to travel and almost make up for lost time. The result of these influences, whatever its purpose was, is what constantly guided his actions and landed him in trouble from time to time.

I was not sure how deep the so-called rift was between Madiba and the President and how much it was imagined in other people's minds. For example, in November 1999 Madiba received a call from President Mbeki asking him to lead negotiations in the war-stricken Burundi. Personally I thought that Madiba couldn't take on more work but he agreed. Because of Madiba's intervention in Zaire (now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo) during his Presidency, I assumed that President Mbeki thought it would be easier for Madiba to try and broker peace against the backdrop of what happened in the DRC. President Mbeki's agenda was also to try to bring about peace in Africa, as it would have economic advantages for South Africa. I also felt that it was perhaps a way for the government to keep Madiba occupied elsewhere and that giving him such a task would fully occupy him and distract him from being tempted or persuaded to

interfere as he had done in the Middle East, or in what was going on at home for that matter.

I felt somewhat for President Mbeki. He was expected to fill the shoes of an icon in history. Yet I also believed that the ANC was responsible for creating this icon, identifying him as the symbol of freedom for the oppressed and it was wrong for ANC people to now feel that Madiba was behaving out of line. Publicly Madiba remained firm, saying that South Africa had never had a better President or Prime Minister in its history than President Mbeki. Sometimes I thought that President Mbeki probably felt that Madiba was patronizing him but Madiba believed in what he was saying, and years later his vision in this regard became apparent. Our country has never been economically as stable as after the Mbeki Presidency, and as a result we were completely shielded from the worldwide economic meltdown of the late 2000s.

There was never any ill intent or deliberateness in anything Madiba did and therefore no reason in my mind why people would feel that Madiba was upstaging the President. It was these prophets of doom's own insecurities that showed. Whether it was really the President himself or his staff that were responsible for this perception I will never know. Madiba would often ask to speak to the President and was told that the call would be returned and it never happened. I felt people were becoming intolerant of the elderly Madiba. We would ask for appointments and were told the President was too busy. What the ANC should have done was to set out an agenda for Madiba but I understand it was difficult precisely because Madiba had such a strong will and determination to do what pleased his heart.

Alan Pillay, who was the administrative officer in our office during Madiba's Presidency, was one of President Mbeki's private secretaries and unless Alan acted as go-between, communication was extremely difficult between the two. Somehow when Alan helped, things happened and worked out fine without politicking.

It was difficult to manage that publicly though. Madiba was making a concerted effort to make sure that he spoke well of the President. Whenever Madiba and the President were together I had the task to ensure that Madiba showed the necessary respect by following protocol and ensuring that we were not seen to undermine protocol and the President in any way. It was difficult because people and the public would still give Madiba the standing ovation, the loudest welcome, and make a big fuss about him.

The President and Madiba were scheduled to be together on Robben Island for the turn of the millennium. At first a verbal invitation was extended and when we heard that the President would be there, we declined, precisely because we feared that Madiba's presence would put the President in a difficult position. We then received a call from the Presidency confirming that the President wanted Madiba to be there. Madiba refused again. We had to convince him by telling him that all his old comrades would be there, and it would be necessary for him to go to see them as there would be a live broadcast worldwide. He eventually agreed.

It was a beautiful evening on Robben Island and I remember chasing people back into the tent to try and force them to show some respect for the President, and not follow us as we were preparing to leave, deserting the tent to follow us while President Mbeki was still inside. I was becoming increasingly unpopular no matter what I did. While I was trying to be loyal to Madiba, I assumed the duty that he had to appear respectful towards the President, but the public and people made it difficult. I would also have to do it in a way not to make Madiba feel inadequate in any way but that he still got afforded the respect he deserved. Every little action therefore turned into a complex situation of thinking about scenarios and analysing everything that got proposed, and it took a lot of energy and emotional capabilities to please everyone and do the right thing. But then you have to stand firm and do whatever the person who employs you expects of you and take criticism and politics on the chin. I had to learn not to be a coward.

People would often write to Madiba to ask him to intervene in matters that were clearly the jurisdiction of a President. And then when I corrected them and referred them to the President's office I was often blamed for overprotecting Madiba and/or controlling him. I was called his 'minder' and I joked to say yes I don't mind. Yet Madiba himself didn't want to be involved in many things. He wanted to continue raising funds for his charities, to build his schools and clinics, but also to have the freedom to speak out on issues for which he was well known – issues of morality and human rights. People insisted on Madiba's attention and personal intervention and it was a lost battle no matter what one did.

* * *

Madiba was well known to be an outstanding fundraiser. He raised millions of dollars for the ANC following the unbanning of the party in the 1990s. Now he was focusing on his charitable causes. The ruler of Dubai had agreed to support his Foundation but due to interference from a South African diplomat in Dubai this particular effort was fruitless. We were only able to speculate as to the reason for the interference and on whose behalf the diplomat acted.

Madiba often boasted about his fundraising abilities. He said as long as it was for a good cause it was easy. Relentless in his approach, and because he never asked for money for himself, it was easy for him to put pressure on someone by arguing the importance of the cause. At first I couldn't figure out how it was so easy for him but after seeing him in action I understood that if you believed in the cause you fundraised for, it comes naturally.

Something which has puzzled me over the years is a story Madiba often repeated and went to great effort to report to President Mbeki and other ANC officials. Madiba was never a great administrator and he genuinely trusted people until the contrary became apparent. It would amaze me how he recited his fundraising efforts and the simplicity with which he considered the process. During his fundraising days for the ANC the moneys would simply be handed from one official to the next and he never mistrusted anyone in the process.

It was an arrangement I thought sounded practical and made sense. Madiba would receive the money, hand it to Tom Nkobi, the Treasurer General of the ANC at the time, to have the moneys deposited. (In our fundraising he refused to receive money personally and would insist that it be deposited or given directly to the Foundation or the Children's Fund, whichever he was trying to help at that stage.) Madiba was removed from society for twenty-seven years and he knew very little about banking or investments. I would then ask Madiba, while he told the story, whether anyone ever kept a record of the money. I was not suspicious of anyone but found it surprising that Madiba himself did not know how much money he really raised.

There was no doubt in his mind that the money reached its final destination, but then he would add that Tom Nkobi later suddenly died of unknown causes. I don't know how this related to the fundraising but it puzzled me and I would lie awake many nights trying to imagine what had happened. Madiba told us how he was

sent from pillar to post when he tried to find a reason for Tom's sudden illness and that when he managed to visit him in Durban he was not left alone with him. Madiba said there was an 'awkward fellow' present, the Indian male nurse who was looking after Tom. Tom lived in Johannesburg, yet when he got ill he was sent to Durban, whereas we are supposed to have some of the world's best medical practitioners in Johannesburg.

In recent years, when the South African businessman Schabir Shaik was charged with corruption and fraud I simply noted the coincidence that his company was called Nkobi Holdings. Madiba, however, was concerned about then Deputy President Jacob Zuma's friendship with Schabir Shaik. Call it a sixth sense, I don't know. Part of Shaik's fraud charges were that he wrote off more than US$150,000 of loans made to Jacob Zuma. In South Africa, the donor of money to a private individual is liable to pay tax if annually that amount exceeds about US$10,000. It was argued that these amounts were paid to Jacob Zuma to influence the outcome of tenders around a controversial South African arms contract to supply the government with world-class artillery.

Shaik was found guilty of corruption and in the court proceedings the judge said that a 'corrupt relationship between Jacob Zuma and Schabir Shaik' had been found.

Madiba went to great lengths to try and discuss this with several ANC officials and on more than three or four occasions we were running around after officials trying to find time for Madiba to raise this matter and ask that it be looked into. No one ever got back to him and I was slowly introduced to the hypocrisy of politics. They would sit in front of him, listen to him and sometimes even agree with him, but then as soon as we left the matter disappeared. On tens of hundreds of occasions I heard him saying to crowds and in speeches that people must guard against only doing what serves their best interests but remain loyal to the cause and to their conscience. More and more even today, you see the hypocrisy that he warned against. As if he could see it coming. Some people have lost the passion for the party, the purpose of the cause: representing the people. It has become a selfish, self-righteous war in South African politics where self-interest is the only agenda, and that has become the cancer of corruption.

* * *

We visited Arusha in Tanzania for the first time as part of Madiba's negotiations in the Burundi peace process. After Arusha we went to New York. It was my first trip to New York too. We stayed in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel and I remember being impressed by the size of the room, although we were guests of the late US Ambassador to the UN, Richard Holbrooke, and didn't stay in the ordinary part of the hotel. My experience of New York was limited to having a proper Waldorf Salad in the Waldorf hotel and visiting the UN. As we had no protocol or media liaison people around us – it was just me – I became even more adamant not to leave the hotel, in case anything happened or Madiba needed me during my absence.

Madiba was interested in engaging with Ambassador Holbrooke to help us raise funds but also to discuss the issues he touched on during his visit to Israel and Palestine the year before, as well as briefing him about Burundi. During our visit Ambassador Holbrooke hosted a reception in his apartment. It was the first time I met Whoopi Goldberg, whom I was told by Madiba did a lot to oppose apartheid during his incarceration. She made a powerful speech during the well-publicized 'Free Mandela Concert' at Wembley Stadium in England in 1988.

I fondly recall meeting Robert De Niro for the first time too. He brought Grace, his wife, and his lovely sons to meet Madiba. Madiba was completely at ease but one of the boys didn't want anything to do with him. Over the years I've come to the conclusion that Madiba has almost been turned into a fantasy character as a result of media exposure. Children do not know how to react towards him and then usually they don't react the way parents expect them to. It's similar to children's reactions when they are confronted with Santa Claus or someone dressed in a Disney character suit. Robert pulled his son to the side and said: 'You will regret this for the rest of your life . . . now behave.' The little boy of about seven years of age had little understanding of that statement and both Madiba and I were amused by Robert's efforts to get his son to react in a way that would be valuable to him in future. The child just refused to co-operate.

It was impressive to visit the United Nations, a body for which Madiba had great respect. We met with Kofi Annan, the then Secretary-General, and I couldn't help but feel the aura of respect between the two men.

Madiba was scheduled to have an interview with Larry King on CNN. In my negotiations with the producers I asked them countless

times to provide us with a set of questions or topics to be discussed as Madiba wanted to be prepared for the interview. They refused and said that Larry never provides such material before an interview. I let it go. Not one of the best interviews Madiba had ever done and it was to Larry's detriment. Madiba closed down and his answers were short and to the point, very unlike him as the warmth of character got lost. He answered the questions he was asked but he didn't really engage. It was clear that the producers were more interested in adding Madiba to Larry's interview CV than getting really good content had he been prepared for the interview. It was a very different experience when Madiba appeared with Oprah. She was warm and friendly and supportive of his work and her team had no problem providing topics beforehand; as a result Madiba responded better.

People always asked very similar questions of Madiba, whether they met him for interviews or extended interactions at functions. They would usually ask him one of a few things and his responses would be standard, sometimes adapted to fit the circumstances during the interview but usually more or less the same: to 'What do you consider the characteristics of a good leader?' he would respond, 'A person who serves his people' and elaborate on that. To 'Do you have no bitterness or regret after spending so much time in prison?' he would respond: 'Regret is the most useless of emotions because you cannot change anything. I made the choices I did because they pleased my soul at the time.' They then frequently asked, 'How would you like to be remembered?' and he would say without hesitation: 'One would leave that to other people to decide how they want to remember you.' I found that funny. He could have said 'a humanitarian', 'a person that served his people', or whatever, but he simply wanted to leave it to others to decide and not be dictating history.

When he passed away in 2013 I noticed how many people had stories to tell about Madiba – some of them so unbelievable and sometimes a bit out of character that made them hard to truly believe for those who knew Madiba well. Yet, at that point I was reminded of his wish that people should be left the freedom to remember him as they wanted and I specifically made a point in an interview, when asked about it, to say that people should be left to do exactly that. Whether their memories were good or bad or even fictional, it really is about what happens in the heart when you hear his name, providing that such stories do not betray his legacy.

We also visited the estate of George Soros, as Madiba asked him

for a donation for the Foundation. Sadly nothing happened and we returned to New York empty handed. I heard later that Mr Soros wasn't completely clear on the strategic direction of the Foundation, hence his hesitation to support it financially, which I thought was fair. The Foundation tried to cater for Madiba's changing agenda. First it was schools and clinics and his post-Presidential office, then the latter remained but its focus shifted to AIDS and education, and later dialogue was added too. It was confusing to the public.

We often found ourselves (me, the doctor and security) waiting for Madiba in these palaces, grand hotels and houses we only ever before saw in movies. On the first few occasions you admire other people's success in life and I think then you are envious, but later a house becomes a house and you don't even notice any longer. The grandeur loses its charm. The only concerns I had was that there should be no stairs to where Madiba was supposed to go, as he had difficulty climbing them, and that he should never be left alone where he could be caught in any situation where he felt compromised and we were not close enough for him to call on us when necessary. I usually settled him in at the meeting and then started monitoring the watch. He never wanted to stay longer than thirty or forty minutes anywhere and usually got to the point of his discussion pretty fast. After thirty minutes, if I was not inside the meeting (which I usually tried to avoid to be able to do other things while waiting outside), I would go in to remind him to watch the time. He would then jokingly tell his hosts, 'No, you see, this is my boss and I have to listen to her otherwise I would lose my job', and people would look at me with strange expressions, from 'oh that's funny' to 'oh yes the whites were the apartheid regime so I'm sure they still do that', totally confused with such remarks. I usually laughed at his comments to try and ease the tension one felt in the room as not everyone got his sense of humour immediately. So whether it was funny or not, I forced a laugh to try and show people that it was just a joke. If he was still there twenty minutes after my first announcement, I would then remind him again and he would without fail get up and announce that it was time for him to leave.

He expected to be 'rescued' sometimes as well. In some meetings he would call me to ask 'how much time do we have?' and that would be an indication to me that I should watch the time and not allow things to drag on for too long. Time was therefore always a matter of great contestation between other people and myself. Not to Madiba,

but to outsiders who felt he should or could stay longer or that he was being disrespectful. To try and please so many people one needed a thirty-six-hour day and it was simply impossible. He was, however, never someone who would do anything against his will. He was a born leader and the person who wanted to remain in charge even when he made others feel that their input was of vital importance to his decision-making process. He had an excessive need for discipline but then also a very very strong will that bordered on hard-headedness sometimes.

* * *

On 28 April 2000 we visited Bujumbura in Burundi. It is one of the most beautiful cities in Africa, surrounded by trees and beautiful landscapes. Sadly the roads and infrastructure have been damaged by the civil war and clearly much had to be done to repair not only the infrastructure but also faith by potential foreign investors. It was tense in the area and although the Burundian people were very happy to receive Madiba, one had to be very careful not to be aligned to any one party involved in the negotiations. We travelled right into the war zone where Madiba addressed refugees and gave them the one thing people needed: hope.

On 3 May we paid a one-day visit to London in order to appear in the royal court in London, following Madiba's appointment as a Queen's Counsel by his friend Queen Elizabeth. We really tried to convince him not to travel to London for one day but he insisted. He wanted to honour his warm friendship with the Queen. I think he was one of very few people who called her by her first name and she seemed to be amused by it. I was entertained by these interactions. When he was questioned one day by Mrs Machel and told that it was not proper to call the Queen by her first name, he responded: 'But she calls me Nelson.' On one occasion when he saw her he said, 'Oh Elizabeth, you've lost weight!' Not something everybody gets to tell the Queen of England.

We travelled like businessmen who often go to Europe for one day. It was however difficult as Madiba was growing old and the logistics weren't as straightforward or simple as hopping onto a plane for a one-day visit overseas. We could only stay for one day as we were scheduled to attend a farewell dinner for Madiba's close friend Dr Mamphela Ramphele at the University of Cape Town the next evening.

She had been appointed to the World Bank and was leaving Cape Town. She was the first medical doctor to attend to his health after he was released from prison and she referred him to some of the best cardiologists in South Africa at the time.

Life also continues to happen even when you are this busy. Madiba's good friend and colleague Dr Ismail Meer passed away and we flew to Durban to go and pay our respects to the Meer family. I noticed that more and more of his friends were passing away and he clearly noticed it too, which must be unsettling for any elderly person. He knew so many people and frequently we found ourselves attending funerals over consecutive weekends. Still it was also something that was expected of him and little consideration was given to what impact it must have on an elderly person to be attending funerals almost weekly.

In May 2000 we travelled to Monaco upon the request of South African billionaire businessman Johann Rupert. Johann provided a private plane to fly Madiba to Monaco where he attended the first ever Laureus Sports Awards. We also met with the now late Prince Rainier and young Prince Albert. It was the first time we met the singer Bono, who was introduced by Naomi Campbell. I had to take time to explain to Madiba who Bono was, that he boycotted South Africa with his music during apartheid and that he was a musical legend to my generation. I was sad to leave Monaco, being a Grand Prix fan, as it was only a day before the qualifying rounds in Monaco. We could hear the Formula 1 cars being tested in the streets and I left feeling disappointed that I came so close to attending a Grand Prix, but I simply couldn't stay.

Then in late 2000 Madiba was invited to visit Australia to attend the 'What Makes a Champion?' conference. He was also scheduled to receive honorary doctorates from the University of Sydney and the University of Technology. Whenever we had to prepare for an honorary doctorate we had to send his measurements in advance for the particular university to prepare his academic robes, including his head measurements. Whenever I would ask to take his measurements he was tolerant but he was eager to get it done sooner than later. He was not the most patient person when it came to fiddling over him. He would agree but urge me to be quick.

By now I had changed so much and I was comfortable around him. He had managed to destroy all my prejudices about black people. I had a deep sense of caring for him like one would care for your own

elderly grandparents. Whenever I didn't see him for a day or two, I would kiss him when I saw him again as we greeted. Later it became every day even if I saw him consecutive days. How much I had changed! I started missing him whenever a day passed that we didn't work. He often held onto me when he walked or took my hand when climbing up or down stairs. I could touch his hair without thinking anything of it, trying to push down on disorderly hair whenever the wind or a hat rumpled it. I had come such a long way and felt angry about the prejudices we were brought up with.

Madiba was always well groomed and took great care in making sure that his skin was well moisturized, and I remember how I sometimes had to struggle during his Presidency to get a particular lotion that was not available on the South African market at the time – simple Palmer's Body Lotion that he used while he was imprisoned. I think the company may have stopped manufacturing it in South Africa for a while and we had to ask people in the United States to buy it in bulk and send it to us in South Africa. The same with the eye drops he preferred: Refresh Plus, the blue and white box. He was just so meticulous about certain things.

In Australia he was scheduled to have meetings with Prime Minister John Howard as well as the famous and rich Packer family, concerning a donors' internet portal to raise funds for the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund and Foundation. His meeting with the Prime Minister was merely a courtesy call. The attempt to persuade the Packer family to donate to his charities was one of the efforts that never realized a donation and I don't know why.

The flight to Australia was tiring but the captain of our commercial plane offered Madiba the crew rest room for him to be able to have a flat bed to sleep on. I thought it was very kind and we were extremely grateful.

Arriving in Sydney we settled in, and after adjusting to the time difference we took Madiba to Sydney's famous zoo. We were allowed to feed giraffes, hold baby kangaroos and koala and watched dingos being fed. I am convinced that we would not have had these privileges if we were not in the company of Nelson Mandela. We toured past the Opera House on a boat and went to have lunch at Prime Minister Howard's residence. I liked him. He was really a kind man and without any pretence. They debated the Aborigines' issues and Madiba was under pressure to speak out against the government for their treatment of the Aborigines. Madiba maintained what he had said for

a long time – that he would listen to the grievances of people but that he would not interfere in the domestic affairs of another country. While he acknowledged and respected them he refused to be drawn into any controversy. It was shortly before the Sydney Olympics and we visited the South African team in the Olympic village, where Madiba addressed them and wished them well.

From Sydney we went on to Canberra where we were hosted by the Governor-General, the equivalent of a head of state. We stayed in his beautiful guest house where one could see the kangaroos through the window while having breakfast in the dining room. On these occasions and while we shared meals Madiba would recite all the knowledge he had about a particular topic. On kangaroos he gave me a long lesson about their pouches and he freely offered knowledge until I asked a question that he didn't know the answer to. That was usually the end of that particular conversation. He didn't like me asking difficult questions.

We also visited Melbourne and it became clear to me that unless one experiences another country by moving around with the ordinary people, it would always be difficult to figure out why so many South Africans move to Australia to start a new life there. Staying in government guest houses and being hosted by them never gives you a real sense of life in another country.

* * *

Back at home the pressure was on the increase. Madiba was more in demand than ever before. He was becoming the saviour of everything and everybody. Whenever people didn't get satisfactory responses from government they would turn to him. He was seen as the person who could intervene in anything and resolve any problems anyone had. People elevated him to a saint-like status and he would remind them: 'A saint is a sinner who keeps on trying.' I loved that saying.

Often people wrote to him from pure frustration when they didn't get solutions from government. We could never interfere with service delivery or matters that could be seen to tread on government territory. We had no desire and we had no time, and sometimes it was really a blessing in disguise to be able to say 'we simply can't'. One had to understand though, that when a person turned to Nelson Mandela it was almost in a last desperate attempt – no matter how frustrated we as administrators became with the endless paperwork

involved. Even people writing to him from prison had to be given the dignity and consideration they deserved of a response, even if it was just an acknowledgement of their existence. Something I didn't ever want on my conscience was a person committing suicide or something happening to someone as a result of our ignorance: if we didn't respond to a letter or simply ignored it.

Being a public figure and making that choice to be in public like Madiba, one has an obligation to the public. It drove my colleagues insane that I would insist on acknowledging people's correspondence even if we couldn't help or weren't interested. Floods of letters were being received from people who needed schools, clinics, medicine, financial assistance, scholarships and every kind of help imaginable. Sometimes it was as simple as: 'Dear Mr Mandela, Can you please buy me a bike.' Madiba was, according to the writer of every letter, their only hope, whether it was poverty, education, social issues, disputes, he was still their President and President to the world.

How we agreed upon things came down ultimately to what he essentially felt like doing. He was, however, never able to turn offers down personally as he never wanted to disappoint people, and if someone had to do that, it was me. I often relied on Professor Gerwel to give us guidance and input but things were pretty much left to Madiba himself to decide. But often Madiba would be convinced to do something by someone who saw him at a meeting and talked him into taking another trip. Madiba was equally to blame. He could say no, but secretly I think he just loved travelling. It was bordering on the ridiculous, though. We were all exhausted. No other person of Madiba's age followed such a gruelling travelling schedule loaded with formal engagements as he did. Yet he would never complain about being tired and always look for another opportunity to travel or do more. His duties were never going to come to an end.

Apart from the Burundi peace process and the schools and clinics project (as well as trying to please the entire world), Madiba was also depended upon by leaders from the rural area he came from. So he received a call from the head of the Pondos, King Thandizulu Sigcau, one day. The call was short and to the point: 'I want you to arrange two bursaries for my daughters to study in the United States', and that was the end of the conversation. There were no other words in that conversation and Madiba, the subject, knew what to do. So he arranged the two scholarships through Coca-Cola. His relationship with the Pondo King was strange and I had great difficulty trying to

understand and comprehend traditional affairs. Whenever we travelled to Qunu over Christmas, King Thandizulu would appear with a sheep as a present to Madiba for Christmas. This gesture meant a lot to Madiba.

The King's daughters successfully completed their studies in the United States and they really made us all proud. They've become role models in their own right and didn't waste the opportunities they got, but grasped them and worked hard. Sadly the King passed away in 2013 while Madiba was hospitalized and we were unable to reach out to them in time to pay our respects. I nevertheless maintained contact with them.

* * *

In 2000 I turned thirty. It was an emotional time for me and I felt as if my youth was over. Silly as one can be at that age. Madiba made fun of me, understandably, and teased me. He would repeatedly ask how old I was supposed to turn in October with a broad smile on his face, and I would respond every time saying thirty!! He would laugh and say, 'Oh no, you are still very young.' He would deliberately pretend to forget just for the sake of teasing me. I didn't feel young and every time he asked I would be upset. He knew that but he loved teasing me, though there was no cruel intent from his side. He would also always ask: 'How many boyfriends do you have now?' And I would come up with any number. Sometimes he would ask when arriving in the office whether I had called all my boyfriends and I would play along and say I couldn't get hold of one or two of them but the rest were all taken care of. My responses in playing along created great laughs on both sides. He had standard questions to all the female staff and teased people in different ways. His humour never failed.

I reflected on matters over the years and decided that even today, in my forties, I am emotionally immature as a result of the stress and pressure of the years. It was a young age for me to have experienced the things I did and absorb the pressures I did. I never had a normal relationship after I started working for Madiba: I was working all the time and when I didn't work I was resting. I never got in touch with mainstream youth apart from my colleagues but I was also never in the same place for long enough to even maintain stable platonic friendships. As a result, I still lack the emotional capability to deal with very ordinary things. But I was becoming good at understanding

politics, how the world operated, taking care of Madiba, and perfecting the art of dealing with logistics and arrangements around the most famous person on earth, and that was my only concern at the time. Still I would never exchange the experience and opportunity of working for Nelson Mandela for any other privileges.

* * *

Again, we got called by former President P. W. Botha. He seemed insistent on holding Nelson Mandela personally responsible for his grudges and grievances with modern South Africa. Many people who have not accepted the new South Africa do that. Whenever something goes wrong, it is put on Madiba's shoulders. People inherently want a scapegoat or someone to say 'I told you so' to when something doesn't go their way. For whites to have surrendered power they were always going to be over-critical of a black government, and when things no longer pleased them it would be blamed on the fact that blacks were inefficient and unable to run the country as they insisted they could. Some people just love complaining, they make a life of it. There is a difference between really being concerned about service delivery and incompetence and just complaining for the sake of it. It is just part of human nature but the racial issue complicated matters.

One day I received such a call from Mr Botha's residence and was told that the former President wanted to speak to Madiba. I returned the call and connected them. I was never Mr Botha's biggest cheerleader and because he didn't address Madiba in a respectful manner to my liking I was always on the back foot when he called. Whenever someone referred to Madiba as 'Mandela' or 'Nelson' my neck hair raised. Yet Madiba was always overly friendly and courteous to Mr Botha. I was reminded of a well-known statement Madiba made saying that it is easier to change others than it is to change yourself. I had to work on my perceptions about Mr Botha. Madiba truly and honestly didn't hold grudges. He had, as a result, no reason to be anything but friendly with his former enemies.

They spoke briefly, after which Madiba asked me to get the Minister of Police. He told me that Mr Botha had complained about the number of bodyguards he was given while he (Madiba) and former President de Klerk received a full contingent of security personnel, yet they were all former presidents. To me, the older you became the less the threat level against you, and the less you moved in public the less

security you needed; I also didn't see how this was Madiba's problem. I nevertheless did as I was told.

We called the Minister and Madiba asked him to look into the matter. Madiba had also promised Mr Botha that I would call him back in a few days and give him a progress report. Two days later Mr Botha called again: 'Juffrou [Miss], when am I supposed to get a report from Mandela?' Not 'how are you?' or anything, just that. I deliberately over-emphasized titles in my response, saying: 'Mister Botha, Mister Mandela has spoken to the Minister and we are awaiting feedback. I am sure that Mister Mandela will respond to you as soon as we have a response from the Minister.' He insisted that I remind Madiba to talk to 'them', implying the government. It was a common occurrence among white South Africans to talk of 'them' and 'us'. 'Us' referred to white South Africans and 'them' or 'they' referred to black people more specifically. The more tolerant I became of certain things such as people's diversity and allowing them to believe what they want without the urge to force my opinion on matters, the more intolerant I was growing to the use of language that demonstrated lack of respect from my own people.

In the old South Africa people used the 'k-word' (kaffir) to refer to black people. It is a derogatory term and now considered hate-speech in our new constitution. Strangely, in my immediate surroundings or whenever I was in their presence family and friends who sometimes used the 'k-word' stopped doing so or avoided it whenever I was around. If they did use it I would reprimand them and possibly avoid seeing them again. It is something that became unbearable to me. And not only the use of that word but also people's generalizations and judgements when it came to black people. Those generalizations were baseless and unjustifiable and I often found myself in heated debates with whites about issues around respect. I would point out the same to black people on social media whenever they used derogatory terms towards whites too, but it could easily get out of hand as I, being white, would cause a furore for trying to reprimand black people, which distracted from the initial argument.

I told Mr Botha that Madiba had spoken to the Minister but he ended the call with 'tell him I'm waiting'. Dropping the phone I thought: I don't think so. There was really no need for me to report this to Madiba and agitate him. I knew that he was waiting to hear from the Minister and that the Minister would act on it. Two days later Mr Botha called with the same questions and orders. I told

Madiba this time and asked whether he could speak to Mr Botha to calm him down; perhaps he then would stop calling me. Madiba said no. I couldn't believe what I heard and laughed at his response. I thought at first he was joking with me. It was not that he was not willing to help either Mr Botha or myself but he didn't want to talk to him again. End of story. And I knew when Madiba felt like that about something or someone, there was no use in trying to convince him otherwise. He didn't often respond like this, so when he did you knew it was the end of the movie. I don't know whether the matter was resolved but we didn't hear from Mr Botha again. I left the matter at that and really couldn't care about how many security guards he had. It was as if he intended to say to Madiba, 'I started the negotiations around you being freed and the ANC being unbanned and now I don't even have enough security guards.' Mr Botha wanted to hold Madiba responsible too. Well, approach determines attitude.

* * *

Increasingly, we were working on peace missions around the world. In March 2001 we travelled to Seoul to talk to the Prime Minister of South Korea about the idea of a Peace Park connecting North and South Korea. The Peace Parks Foundation negotiates and establishes conservation areas that stretch over national borders, creating an area to restore ecological communities. Madiba was the Patron of the Peace Parks Foundation, headed by Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands and Dr Anton Rupert. Prince Bernhard and Dr Rupert had been friends for centuries and together they established the World Wide Fund for Nature Conservation with great success, followed by the Peace Parks Foundation. On our visit to South Korea President Kim Dae-jung was receptive of the idea but clearly expressed his disbelief that North Korea would come to the party. Our requests to meet with the Chairman of the National Defence Commission of North Korea, the supreme position of power held by Kim Jong-il at the time, fell on deaf ears and we never received a response.

The public probably thought that Madiba would be welcomed anywhere in the world. Well, no. North Korea was one such place. No interest whatsoever. We tried to avoid situations where we felt there was a chance of failure but because of Prince Bernhard's and Dr Rupert's involvement in this particular case Madiba wanted to try at least. We sat around in South Korea for a few days, and when we

realized that the North Koreans were ignoring us we simply returned home. Strangely, being so far away from home and not attending to official business gave us a bit of a break from the craziness back at home. On this particular visit I was again asked to be in Madiba's room when the masseuse came to his room for treatments. As usual I tried to give that task to one of the security men, until I noticed that the masseuse was blind. Even though I had told Madiba in Afrikaans that she was blind he was alert all the time during the massage as opposed to being relaxed. I feared that at some point he was going to tell her to stop and I just couldn't control myself from laughing out loud. It's not that I didn't have respect for her or her disability but more about Madiba, who appeared so tense in the situation. She was, contrary to what I expected, exceptionally professional. They say if you are born without one of your senses some of the others overdevelop and I got to see that. It was clear that she was an excellent masseuse and had 'healing hands'.

Madiba had this strange habit of keeping his watch on local South African time no matter where in the world we were travelling. We had to wake up at the strangest hours in order for him not to adjust his body clock to time difference too much so that he would not suffer from jet-lag when we returned home. And then, wherever we were in the world, in whatever time zone, we had to call Mrs Machel wherever she was in the morning and in the evening. I remember being in Seoul and not finding Mrs Machel immediately and Madiba insisting on staying awake until we did. It was one of those precious things he insisted on, being a husband. She had to be called in the morning before she had breakfast and in the evening before she went to sleep. 'How are you Mum, how was your day?' he would say. Upon which I would leave the room to give them a few minutes of privacy before resuming our programme or getting on with business. It would also give me the opportunity to then tell Mum what we were up to during the day.

We were then invited for Madiba to receive the German Media Prize in Baden-Baden and to be flown to Germany courtesy of Mercedes-Benz. By now I had appointed an assistant, Marianne Mudziwa, and Maretha was filling the gaps where necessary. They relieved me of much of the admin pressure. The staff in the office were still relying on me for guidance in terms of responses to people who wrote to Madiba. Since we didn't have a protocol or media section, all liaison where it concerned Madiba personally was pretty

much left to me. So were the media enquiries. Madiba and Prof. Gerwel were my only guides. I would sometimes call Madiba twenty times a day to ask his advice on things whenever he didn't come to the office. He patiently answered me and told me how to do things, how to respond and where to find answers if he couldn't give them to me, and then always consult Prof. Gerwel.

He would explain his strategy to me, how he thought it best to approach a particular issue he wanted to raise or what his plans were to achieve an end goal in the greatest detail, and I was expected to ensure that we stuck to whatever strategy he decided upon. And when he spoke, you listened. I always made notes of things he said, of crucial keywords. I would often repeat something to him after he had said it but then he would correct me or go into more detail if it was necessary or he suspected that I misunderstood. Semantics subsequently became a passion to me. It is not easy for someone whose first language is not English to speak it fluently and I realized I had to be extremely careful of what and how I said things. Sometimes I got it right, sometimes I didn't, but Madiba was patient and he never pointed out mistakes but would find a subtle way to explain things to me differently. 'No, you see . . .' followed by the explanation. Most of the time though I managed to get it right. I couldn't afford to be a liability to him.

The trip to Baden-Baden was approaching in March 2001 and, having a full travelling schedule ahead, I had to focus my attention on organizing the upcoming trip, liaising to ensure that travel, accommodation, planes, trains and automobiles were all organized to not only befit Nelson Mandela but also to his best comfort. The pressure was increasing and for two nights prior to departure I worked right through the night, preparing for the visit and trying to avoid a situation where I left the office behind with a backlog of correspondence.

As flights from South Africa to Europe leave early evening we departed for Germany on a Thursday evening. I usually sat next to Madiba in the plane if the seat beside him could not be left open to afford him more space or Mrs Machel didn't accompany us, and on this night the Lufthansa flight was full so my seat was next to his. I would usually settle him in once we got on board the plane, making sure he didn't want anything to eat or drink, and then prepared his bed for the night in the best possible way in a first-class cabin after take off. Generally airlines were great in having specific food on board

for him and making sure we had enough pillows and blankets for him to be comfortable. After helping him to settle in I strapped myself in my seat for take off and promptly fell fast asleep, only waking up the next morning as we landed. I had slept right through the night and I deserted Madiba. I hadn't even brushed my teeth or washed my face, something I never neglected no matter what.

I was angry at myself and questioned the security staff about his comfort through the night. The crew took care of him together with security and he was fine, but it was inexcusable to me as I failed in my task. I felt guilty for days after.

I noticed when I woke up I was covered with a blanket and had a pillow behind my head. When I asked the security who had covered me they said Madiba did. The poor man. Here I was supposed to take care of him but he was taking care of me instead. Madiba was worried that I was not getting enough sleep and he would complain to Prof. Gerwel often that I was working too hard – however it didn't make Madiba stop calling me or slow down either.

I remember on another occasion on a British Airways flight waking up during the night because of movement around me. Madiba went to the bathroom in the middle of the night, under the watchful eye of security. I lay awake waiting for him to return to his seat to see if he needed anything and when he passed me on his way back to his seat, he stopped and covered my feet with a blanket. These moments touched the most inner part of my heart. I couldn't remember as a child being tucked in by my parents, yet here the man we all had feared in the late 1980s (when we became aware of his existence) was covering my feet, worried about my well-being. Sometimes when I was tired I would silently weep, appreciating how much this man cared for me. It felt like no one else loved me as much as Madiba did. He treated me like I was part of his people, caring for me like you would for your own. And my history made it almost impossible to accept that I deserved any of this care and love.

There was never really any down time and we spent hours together each day. When we travelled without Mrs Machel or one of the daughters he didn't want to be alone during meal times and I would therefore often have to sit with him. I wanted to give him space but he would insist on me returning shortly after I left him anytime.

I enjoyed sitting with him at meals while we travelled, listening to his stories but also hearing his views on so many things. He remained adamant that the biggest challenge that faced 'our people' was

education and the rationale behind his belief made perfect sense. I understood all the challenges the government faced, not having been in power before and having to deal with the financial challenges involved in reworking the financial system and replenishing the funds that were used to keep apartheid going. Few people realized that the apartheid regime borrowed money from the state pension funds to support apartheid and now that a new government was in power no one knew where the money would come from to rebuild those pension funds. It was not something that was revealed to the ANC before they came into power and now they had not only to deliver on their promises to the people but also find the funds to replenish pension funds.

I valued these explanations from Madiba. Simple and to the point and in terms I could understand. It changed my way of thinking and soon I would defend the ANC in debates with my friends. I started withdrawing from my more conservative Afrikaans friends as few of them understood the new political reasoning.

Madiba was everybody's hero. Black people hailed him for bringing them freedom, and whites simply because he wore a Springbok shirt to the Rugby World Cup final in 1995. He achieved his goal to unite the country, but it didn't bring relief to the poorest of the poor. While he was acceptable to most white people there were still 'pockets of racism' as he described it. And sadly South Africa is still dismally failing its youth. For example, in 2012 some schools in the impoverished Limpopo Province to the north of the country did not receive textbooks for their pupils from the government for an entire academic year, despite being ordered to by the courts as a result of action taken by a non-governmental organization. They just didn't deliver them to the schools and the books were found in a warehouse. It was precisely during these travels and conversations that I got so much of an understanding about politics, its mechanics and how the ANC operated.

* * *

From Baden-Baden we travelled to India, where Madiba received the Gandhi Peace Prize. We also visited Kerala, a province in India. We were taken from Delhi by helicopter to Kerala and although it gave us a picturesque view of India's landscape I was not completely convinced that we were safe aboard the huge helicopter they

transported us in. (I would often invent stories in my mind about tragic headlines whenever I didn't feel safe. It was stupid but one cannot help but contemplate these things when you travel that much in so many foreign countries, sometimes facing challenging situations. You can't ever tell your host that you feel unsafe.) It was visibly old and bigger than some planes we had flown in before, yet in the back of my mind I knew that the Indian government wouldn't risk Madiba's life while in their country and that made me feel safer.

The Indian people were hospitable and they adored Madiba. If there is one thing Madiba and I shared a love for it was eating biryani, an Indian dish made from rice, spices, meat, chicken or fish. Madiba had loved it before he went to prison, enjoying it with his Indian friends. It is one of the things he greatly missed while being imprisoned, not having the food that he enjoyed. And in India we were looking forward to having Indian meals and had biryani or samosas at every possible occasion. I never knew what biryani was until he suggested I try it. After that, I could comprehend his fondness for it.

On a visit to Ireland in April 2001, while being hosted by Tony and Chryss O'Reilly after being invited to address an event for the Independent Newspaper group, news broke about South Africa's cricket captain, Hansie Cronje, being embroiled in match fixing. Being the Chairman of the Independent Newspaper group at the time and a great sports man himself, Dr O'Reilly debated this matter with us. Both Madiba and I were adamant that these were merely allegations and that we were convinced that there was no truth in them, but Dr O'Reilly doubted Hansie's innocence. We called Hansie to wish him strength. In the days to follow Hansie Cronje, who was everybody's hero in South Africa, was disgraced when he admitted to the match fixing.

The following year, on 1 June 2002, I was with Madiba at Shambala, the house built by businessman Douw Steyn on a game farm in the north where Madiba intended to write his memoirs, when I received a call in the early morning from the media, asking for comments on the rumour that Hansie had been killed in a plane crash. I started panicking. I had received a voicemail message from Hansie the week before congratulating me on my birthday, and I still wanted to call him to tell him he was light years away from my real birthday date which is only at the end of October. But I hadn't. We were friends and I couldn't believe what I heard.

A few hours later, confirmation was received. I went to tell Madiba of the news and I was very sad when I broke it to him. Hansie was a kind, gentle human being and yes, he'd made mistakes but at some point we all do. The last time Madiba saw Hansie was a few months before, after Hansie had admitted to match fixing and was banned from the sport for life. He was a broken man. At the time we went to Fancourt, a hotel resort with an adjacent estate, for a few days' rest and Madiba asked Hansie to visit him as Hansie had a house on the estate too. He sat him down and told him: 'Boy, you made a big mistake. Now you have to man-up and face the consequences. It doesn't mean we won't forgive you. You have admitted to your mistake, now move on.' Hansie was just getting back on his feet again when he died on that cold winter's morning. I was also taught that no matter what mistakes a person makes, you yourself cannot expect to be forgiven if you are not willing to forgive. It reminded me of a piece Madiba wrote in prison that was later published in the book Conversations With Myself. He wrote: 'Don't run away from your problems; face them! Because if you don't deal with them, they will always be with you.'

It was a very sad winter's day as I also received a call from my father to inform me that his nephew Ettienne, whom I had been very fond of, had been in a motorbike accident in Cape Town. He was returning DVDs his children had rented and took a quick trip with his motorbike. He hit an oncoming car. A week later Ettienne died in hospital. It was a sad time and I didn't understand why two such young lives had to end so tragically. All my senses were overreacting and I felt extremely alone that night in that big house. Madiba was never an overly emotional person and it was therefore difficult to lay my sadness out in front of him. He would go quiet and that was his way of dealing with things. I wanted to give vent to my emotions but it sometimes felt reprehensible. I felt very lonely.

* * *

Back at home, the normal day of business included time with family and business people. Madiba always had a cause to fundraise for. If it wasn't a young AIDS sufferer, it was a youngster who performed well at school but struggled to find a bursary, or even relief for areas hit by severe floods. Madiba also insisted on staying in touch with ordinary people and so he went to have lunch at the residence of the family

that owns and runs a major dry-cleaning business in Johannesburg. They had been handling his dry cleaning for years, and despite the fact that he insisted on paying for it he felt compelled to have a meal with the family who had looked after his clothes with so much care.

To me it is still one of Madiba's greatest virtues: his attention to people that not anyone of his stature would usually pay attention to. He recognized and really respected the small people. No one was treated as a servant.

He also didn't want to be removed from his old colleagues and people of his age group. He would ask to have lunch with the musicians and stars from his generation, like Ken Gampu, Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela, Dorothy Masuka and Dolly Rathebe, and after the lunch he would decide to raise 'cars' for the women who struggled financially to make a living with their singing. These women all used their music to convey political messages during the struggle years and Madiba felt that he owed them a gesture that would show appreciation. He felt responsible for everyone around him: his family, his colleagues, his staff and in this case even the people that supported the anti-apartheid movement while he was imprisoned. He found inspiration through their art while being imprisoned and felt a great deal of gratitude towards them. We would then phone all the major car companies in South Africa and convince them to donate cars to these struggle heroes.

A little boy of about eight years of age wrote to Madiba one day, in quite a formal tone, asking for an appointment. His only reason for wanting to meet with Madiba was to discuss matters relating to South Africa. The letter was formal and amused us as he also said that his parents didn't think he stood a chance in being granted an appointment with Nelson Mandela. I showed the letter to Madiba and we agreed to grant him the appointment. He visited Madiba and he was as formal in his interaction with Madiba as he was in his letter. 'No, there was no particular reason for my asking for an appointment with you, Sir; I simply wanted to meet with you.' Madiba was entertained by the young man's honesty about the matter and it gave us great joy to experience such moments that really made him happy to be in contact with ordinary people without any agenda, just wanting to meet him because they were intrigued by him.

Madiba also had the needs of his grandchildren to cater for. Whenever we left for an overseas trip the boys (the three youngest of his eldest son), Ndaba, Mbuso and Andile, would give me a shopping

list of the things they wanted their grandfather to bring them like all children do when their parents go abroad. He then sometimes sent me out on the streets of wherever we were to try to find things I had never heard of before myself. Not having my own children it was quite difficult to even distinguish between animated characters, let alone computer games. When Sony introduced PlayStation, we had to call the Japanese Ambassador to ask him to ship a PlayStation to South Africa as the children could simply not wait for it to be released here. One of the very few privileges of the children having Nelson Mandela as their grandfather was that they would always be the first to have the latest games and gadgets, before many of their peers.

During a visit in Cape Town he was again going from pillar to post trying to oblige with expectations, and after recording a TV interview he felt dizzy and nearly fainted. As he was generally always well these spells whenever he wasn't feeling well created great concern. Despite that he continued and only the next day, after visiting an area in the Klein Karoo where a school had to be built, did he agree to visit a doctor when we returned to Cape Town. He was stubborn and insisted on going to the school and not cancel it to see a doctor first. The cardiologist examined him and couldn't find anything alarming. It was pure exhaustion.

Madiba was scheduled to leave for London that night. We protested and begged him not to go, but he insisted. He said he was fine and he didn't want to alarm anyone by cancelling the visit. We left for London and then went on to visit Morocco (where we saw the King and asked for a donation for the Foundation) and then to visit Sharjah, an emirate within the United Arab Emirates and the cultural capital of the UAE. There we found the same diplomat who was involved in our previous visit to Dubai (when we had failed to secure a promised donation from the Ruler). Before we landed I made sure that the Embassy received our message that we wouldn't need any diplomatic support and that diplomats were not required to accompany us during the visit. Yet when we landed that same man was there.

Madiba was beyond angry at him but somehow he left it to me to deal with. By now I could read his facial expressions. He was blunt and unfriendly. The diplomat sat around in Madiba's lounge when we arrived at the hotel. I entered and told Madiba that it was time for him to retire for the day. I told the diplomat that he was free to leave and he announced that he would still stay for a while. He also asked

for the programme for the following days. I got irritated and in front of Madiba told him that I had sent a message that while we appreciated he had a responsibility, we would call him if we needed any assistance. Madiba's eyes went big and years later he would still tease me over the matter and warn people that if they didn't listen to me, I would deal with them. I really wasn't that stern but he enjoyed it that I had the courage to set someone straight like that. However, I also think he was only too grateful that I did it rather than him having to do so.

In May Madiba visited a urologist, Dr Gus Gecelter, accompanied by Mrs Machel. He was taken to Parklane Clinic in Johannesburg the following day where some tests were administered, but he didn't say anything and I didn't want to interfere or question him over his private matters. I knew from previous experience that if there was anything to share, he would do so.

In June 2001 the head of Coca-Cola in South Africa invited Madiba to address the Coca-Cola group of Africa on a cruise the company undertook through the Mediterranean. By this time the company had built a school in rural South Africa and helped with other donations for projects whenever he called upon them. Madiba felt obliged to respond. I didn't complain about a trip on a luxury yacht for five days and it also meant we would be away from the pressures in Johannesburg, the endless requests via telephone and faxes being received and considered daily. At least we would have five nights to sleep in one place and on a ship where no one could find us.

When I read some of the guests' names to Madiba, including the world-famous boxer Sugar Ray Leonard, he became excited. He used to box in his youth and still enjoyed the sport and would often quote Muhammad Ali or Sonny Liston. His favourite quote from Ali was 'move like a butterfly, sting like a bee'. I would ask him what he meant and Madiba would explain in great detail how important it was to be light on your feet in the boxing ring, and that Ali's punch stung like a bee. 'Painful,' he would say, pulling a face while he said it to make me understand that it must have been really painful if Ali hit someone. He loved talking about all the boxers, some of them names I had never heard before.

The trip on the cruise was pure bliss. The hospitality outstanding. The captain of the ship told me to 'drink as much champagne as you can, in fact bath in it if you can because you'll never find another ship with so much champagne on board'. We couldn't really drink too

much however, as we had to be 'on standby' for Madiba twenty-four hours a day. Madiba was expected to attend two events while on the ship and to make a speech at one of them, encouraging loyalty and dedication from the employees and congratulating them on the company's achievements in Africa while he inspired them to continue having the goodwill of the previously disadvantaged at the top of their agenda.

However, Charles, the travelling doctor, and I decided to join the festivities. When Madiba retired to bed at night we sneaked out to go and join the party on the deck. We couldn't go far because we were stuck on a ship and the security men knew where to find us at all times, so we had a bit of freedom to move around on the vessel. Unlike any of the trips we had been on before. One morning we were the last ones dancing and got back to our respective cabins just in time to prepare to join Madiba for breakfast. Charles had no obligation to be with Madiba during breakfast, but I did. I could hardly keep my eyes open and suffered the entire day. We were cruising and I took Madiba outside to enjoy the view of the beautiful coastline while he sat and read his newspapers, now and then staring across the ocean to the endless horizon. I sat next to him, snoozing on and off from time to time. After five days on the ship Madiba became uneasy and we all started to get 'cabin fever'. It was time to return to the fast-paced life.

We were scheduled to stop over in Barcelona on our way back to South Africa in support of an initiative for the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund called Frock and Roll. This was a concert and fashion show organized by Naomi Campbell and Bono. The rest of U2 were present too, and while performing their hit 'One' Madiba was scheduled to enter. I felt so proud that Nelson Mandela belonged to our country. The crowd first went completely crazy when Bono took the stage and we could hear and see their reaction from the wings until Madiba was prompted to walk on. The crowd erupted with joy to see him. It was not announced that he would be there and he caught the public by surprise. Bono introduced Madiba and it took some minutes for the crowd to quieten down to allow him to speak.

Upon embarking the plane for our departure back to South Africa, Madiba sat down and stared in front of him for a while. He then leaned towards me and said: 'Zeldina, this Bono chap, it seems to me he is quite popular.' I couldn't help but laugh out loud and told Madiba that Bono was one of the world's music heroes and that he

had a following that few other musicians could reach for. Madiba seemed interested in this ‘Bono chap’ and he looked impressed that a young man was so popular among young people. It was the first time he witnessed his following.

DEEL DRIE

Hekwagter vir die beroemdste man in die wêreld

1999–2008

7

Reis en konflik

Ons het planne beraam om 'n kantoor in die president se ou huis in Houghton in te rig. Teen hierdie tyd het hy in 'n nuwe huis ingetrek na sy troue met mevrou Machel in 1998. Sy ou huis was 'n groot dubbelverdieping wat nooit regtig goed versier is nie en ook deur die jare agteruitgegaan het. Die huis het nou leeggestaan en ek het geweet dit sal 'n goeie plek wees om 'n kantoor in te rig omdat dit ook naby sy nuwe huis was. Ek het Madiba gevra of ek daar kon bly terwyl ek vir my 'n plek in Johannesburg soek.

Hy wou eers hê ek moet op die perseel van sy nuwe huis bly, maar ek het dit van die hand gewys omdat ek geweet het ek het afstand nodig en dat nie almal in sy familie my daar sou wou hê nie. Ek het gereël dat my meubels van Kaapstad by die ou huis in Houghton afgelewer moes word.

Ek het die enigste leefbare slaapkamer op die boonste verdieping vir myself begin skoonmaak. Dit was Madiba se ou slaapkamer, wat in die heel aakligste skakering van blou geverf was wat jy jou kan indink. Ek dink nie sulke goed het hom gepla nie. Alles was blou, en al hou ek van blou was daardie net té blou. Dit was 'n eenvoudige kamer, regtig nie die soort wat by 'n president hoort nie, en ek is bly mevrou Machel het hom 'n bietjie meer gewys dat 'n paar wêreldse plesiertjies soos 'n groter kamer met 'n bietjie meer waardigheid nie skade doen nie, en dat 'n mens die sonlig kon waardeer wat deur die venster val in 'n kamer wat jou laat welkom voel eerder as om jou gemoed af te rem. Maar hy het altyd nederig gebly in vergelyking met ander mense in dieselfde posisie.

Ek het die ministerie van openbare werke gekontak en gevra om 'n amptenaar te stuur sodat ons meubels vir Madiba se kantoor kon aankoop, soos regeringsbeleid bepaal. Hulle het ingestem. Hulle het

ook seker gemaak die telefoon en faksmasjien word so vinnig moontlik geïnstalleer.

In die dae wat gevolg het, het ek begin uitpak en ’n bietjie gevestig geraak in ons nuwe kantoor, wat bekend sou staan as kantoor van die president, ná sy ampstermyn, oftewel die Nelson Mandela-stigting, van waar hy sy openbare diens sou voortsit. Professor Gerwel het ’n raamwerk opgestel van waarop die kantoor moes fokus, en die stigtingtrustakte het hom die ruimte gegee om sy ambisie om skole en klinieke te bou uit te leef, en om sy betrokkenheid by die stryd teen vigs voort te sit. Dit sou ook ’n ruimte skep vir dialoog en ’n fisieke gebou waar hy sy skryfwerk kon voorsit en gedenkwaardighede kon bewaar. Chaos het egter uitgebreek en spoedig het die hele wêreld president Mandela gesoek om hom vir hulle saak te probeer werf. Ek het nie geweet hoe ons hiervoor sou betaal nie, maar ek moes mense aanstel, want ek sou nooit alles op my eie kon behartig nie. Professor Gerwel het gereeld besoek afgelê en een van ons vorige kollegas, Loïs Dippenaar, gevra om die chaos onder beheer te help kry. Een na die ander het ek Lydia Bailis, Maretha Slabbert en Jackie Maggot oorreed om by ons kantoor aan te sluit. Ek het hulle eers omgepraat deur te sê dit sou net tydelik wees, maar uiteindelik het die reëling vir baie jare gehou.

Soms sou hulle in die middag huis toe gaan terwyl ek agter my lessenaar sit, en die volgende dag wanneer hulle terugkom, sit ek nog steeds presies daar waar hulle my gelaat het. Party nagte het ek glad nie geslaap nie en maar dwarsdeur die nag briewe gelees en antwoorde getik sodat hulle die volgende dag gefaks kon word. Ek het gemeen hoe vinniger ek kon antwoord, hoe minder mense sou bel om versoeke op te volg. Dit was een manier om telefoonoproepe te verminder, wat die druk baie sou laat afneem. Baie keer het my moed my begewe en wou ek net tou opgooi en loop, maar ek kon nie. Soms het ek gewonder wat mense aanspoor om ’n telefoon of ’n pen op te tel en Nelson Mandela te kontak. Dit was net een te veel en my frustrasie was op breekpunt – ’n vlak wat amper die norm geword het.

Wanneer ek so deur die nag gewerk het, het ek gewoonlik so seweuur boontoe gegaan om te stort voor die ander personeellede weer by die werk aankom, en dan sou ek net voortgaan met my dag

sonder enige slaap. Na omtrent drie dae in ’n ry sou ek dit nie meer kon hou nie en die hele dag omslaap … en dan begin alles weer van voor af.

Madiba het spoedig meer en meer kantoor toe gekom en hy het besoekers wat na hom as ‘president’ verwys het, herinner dat hy nou afgetree was en nie meer ‘president’ genoem wou word nie. Hy wou gehad het hulle moes hom meneer Mandela of Madiba noem.

Aangesien ek hom Khulu genoem het, moes ek nie die manier waarop ek hom aanspreek aanpas nie, net die manier waarop ek na hom verwys het. Voortaan sou dit Madiba of meneer Mandela wees, pleks van die president. Wanneer mense hom Meneer die President noem, het hy gevra: ‘Waar was jy toe ek afgetree het?’ Mense het die woord versprei en uiteindelik het dit opgehou. Hy wou ook nie U Edele of dit of dat wees nie. Hy was tevrede met meneer Mandela of Madiba en het gereeld vir mense gesê: ‘Noem my net Madiba.’ Hy het gesê ’n titel verander nie wie ’n mens is nie. Dit was sy manier om vir ons te laat verstaan hy wil geen titel hê nie. Met die laaste opname was daar meer as eenduisend-eenhonderd-sewe-en-sewentig huldeblyke aan hom gebring. Seshonderd-sewe-en-negentig was toekennings van een of ander soort en daar was ook honderd-en-twintig eredoktorsgrade. Wanneer mense die eredoktorsgrade as rede gebruik het om hom as ‘doktor’ aan te spreek, het hy baie vinnig verduidelik dat hy nooit vir enige van dié doktorsgrade gestudeer het nie en dat dit maar net eerbetonings was.

Laat in 1999 het ek ’n brief van die presidensie ontvang om my mee te deel dat ek bevorder is tot assistentdirekteur van die kantoor van die president. Hoewel ek nog steeds aan Madiba gesekondeer was, kon hulle die hoër rang aan my toeken op grond van beskikbare poste binne die strukture van die presidensie.

Dit was duidelik dat die stigting finansiering nodig sou hê om die kantoor se onkostes te dek. Ons het met geleende geld begin, met die woorde van Madiba en professor Gerwel as die enigste waarborg: ‘Ons sal so gou as moontlik terugbetaal, moet ons asseblief nie rente vra nie.’ Madiba was nog steeds ’n ikoon vir die wêreld, maar in Suid-Afrika ontvang gewese presidente nie finansiering of ondersteuning om hul openbare optredes voort te sit nie. Tog het die wêreld dieselfde verwagtinge van hom gehad as voorheen, al het sy amptelike

status verander.

Dit was duidelik dat Madiba verwag het dat dinge moes voortgaan soos in die verlede. Hy het soggens opgestaan asof niks verander het nie. Hy was nog net so vasbeslote as voorheen om verandering in Suid-Afrika teweeg te bring en om die samelewing van alle vorme van diskriminasie vry te maak. Hy het my met opdragte gebel en as ek die foon neersit, was ek paniekbevange. Ek het nie geweet hoe ek al die dinge sou kon reël wat hy van my verwag het nie. Hy het dieselfde met professor Gerwel gedoen, en dié het in 'n grap gesê hy werk nie meer vir Madiba nie. Professor Gerwel sou as voorsitter van die raad van die Nelson Mandela-stigting dien. Hoewel ek nog steeds vir die staat gewerk het, het ek geen idee gehad hoe om dinge te laat gebeur sonder enige infrastruktuur nie. En tog het Madiba geweet hoe om my verby my perke aan te moedig. Nadat ons infrastruktuur amper oornag in duie gestort het, was ek self nie seker of ek sou kon aangaan soos vroeër nie. Hy het my geduldig gelei en ek was dankbaar en bevoorreg om 'n fantastiese leermeester en mentor te kon hê.

Madiba het in Augustus 1999 gesê hy is moeg en het 'n vakansie nodig. Dit was 'n uitdaging. Waarheen sou ons gaan? Hoe kom ons daar? Ek het skielik besef ons het die voorreg van 'n privaat vliegtuig verloor met sy aftrede en dat dit meer as 'n miljoen rand sou kos om 'n privaat vliegtuig te huur vir 'n reis Amerika toe. Ons het eenvoudig nie daardie soort geld gehad nie en Madiba sou in elk geval nie soveel wou uitgee op 'n vakansie nie. Tony O'Reilly en sy vrou, Chryss, het Madiba en mevrou Machel na hul huis in Nassau in die Bahamas genooi. Tony is die voormalige eienaar van Heinz-kosprodukte en was in daardie stadium die eienaar van Independent News and Media. Hulle sou na ons omsien terwyl ons daar is, maar ek het geen idee gehad hoe ons daar gaan kom nie. Ek was paniekbevange.

Madiba kon nie in 'n klein vliegtuigie reis nie, aangesien hy ordentlik moes slaap en regop moes kon staan sonder om sy beseerde knie te buig om badkamergeriewe te gebruik. Hy het die probleem met sy knie gehad as gevolg van 'n besering op Robbeneiland. En soos hy ouer geword het, het dit erger geword. Dit was vir hom moeilik om trappe te klim. Hy kon nie meer as 'n paar op 'n keer baasraak nie.

Ek het Tokyo Sexwale, een van Madiba se ou kamerade en ook een van die rykste sakemanne in die land, en wat ek geweet het

konneksies met mense met privaat vliegtuie het, gebel. Hy het ons in kontak gebring met ’n paar mense, maar nie een van hulle kon ons help nie. Ek het al die ryk mense in Suid-Afrika met privaat vliegtuie genader, soos die Oppenheimers en die Ruperts, en selfs oorsee gebel na Michael Jackson om te vra of ons sy vliegtuig kan leen. Nie een van die vliegtuie was beskikbaar nie; almal is uitverhuur of deur die eienaars gebruik. Die enigste uitweg was dat ons op ’n gewone kommersiële vlug sou moes reis. Ek weet nie hoe ons dit reggekry het nie, maar ons het. Mettertyd het ons die kuns vervolmaak. Madiba kon gerieflik op kommersiële vliegtuie reis. Die enigste vereiste was dat die eersteklas-geriewe voorsiening moes maak vir ’n sitplek wat in ’n plat bed omskep kon word waarop hy kon slaap en dat die betrokke lughawe die geriewe gehad het om ’n passassier te help tot in die vliegtuig sodat hy nie enige trappies hoef te klim nie. Aan die begin was dit ’n nagmerrie om die passasiers en bemanning in toom te hou en te verhoed dat Madiba oorval word met versoeke om spyskaarte en allerhande items sommer reg deur die nag te laat teken.

So het ons na die Bahamas vertrek op ons eerste vakansie in vyf jaar. Madiba, mevrou Machel, Josina, ek, veiligheidswagte en ’n dokter. Ons was almal senuweeagtig maar dit het goed uitgewerk. Ons het in Atlanta na ’n ander vlug oorgeklim en na Nassau gereis. ’n Mens moes ’n manier vind om aan Madiba se vereistes te voldoen, maar ook die vermoëns van lughawens en hul ondersteuningspersoneel in ag neem. Dit het onderhandelinge geverg en ons moes gereeld ’n kompromie aangaan. By elke lughawe wou mense hom oorval met versoeke vir foto’s en handtekeninge. En dit na lang vlugte. Na ’n vlug van sestien uur behoort daar nie van ’n een-en-tagtigjarige verwag te word om foto’s te laat neem of sy handtekening uit te deel nie. Hy het ruimte nodig gehad om asem te skep en van sy kragte te herwin wanneer hy ook al kon, en al wou ’n mens nie ongeskik wees met die mense nie, moes ek baie hard probeer om aan hulle te verduidelik dat hy oud was, ruimte nodig gehad het en nie met hierdie goed gesteur moes word nie. In party gevalle het die mense verstaan, maar daar was altyd dié wat geweier het om moed op te gee.

Na die vakansie in die Bahamas het ons die wêreld vol gereis om geld in te samel vir die Nelson Mandela-stigting. In Duitsland het Madiba die destydse kanselier, Gerhard Schröder, genader vir ondersteuning.

Van Duitsland af het ons na Tunis vertrek om president Ben Ali te vra om ons te ondersteun. Hy het die allermooiste paleis gehad wat met die fynste mosaïek versier is.

Daarna is ons na Tripoli om die Broeder Leier Ghadaffi te besoek om sy hulp te vra. Die leiers in die Weste het maar ’n blinde oog gegooi oor Madiba se vriendskap met Ghadaffi. Dit was altyd vermaaklik om die Broeder Leier te sien. Ons het gewoonlik in Tripoli aangekom en dan dae lank gewag voordat ons ’n antwoord van hom af gekry het oor waar en wanneer ons hom kon sien, en dan moes almal skielik spring om by sy wegkruipplek êrens in die woestyn uit te kom. Hy was altyd bedag op verrassingsaanvalle uit die Weste uit wraak vir die Lockerbie-bomaanval. Tydens hierdie besoek het hy ons vir ete genooi en terwyl ons in die namiddag daar was, het hy gevra wat hy daardie aand vir ons kon laat voorberei. Teen daardie tyd was ek al ’n hele paar keer saam met Madiba by die Broeder Leier en ek sou raai hulle was gewoond aan my gesig. Hy het my met respek behandel en my tuis laat voel.

Vroeër die middag het ek en Madiba oor kameelvleis gepraat terwyl ons verby kamele gery het en toe die Broeder Leier vra wat ons vir aandete wou hê, het Madiba gedink dit sou gepas wees om vir kameelvleis te vra. ‘Natuurlik,’ het die Broeder Leier geantwoord. (Hy wou nooit president genoem word nie omdat hy gedink het dis ’n uitvinding van Westerlinge wat hy nie sou aanvaar nie. Tot en met sy dood het ons nog na hom verwys as die Broeder Leier.) Die kameelvleis het presies soos lam gesmaak. Ek het later gehoor hulle moes babakamele slag omdat die vleis van volwasse kamele baie taai was, en het daar en dan besluit dat ek nooit weer kameelvleis sou eet nie. Dit het maar baie selde gebeur dat ’n staatshoof Madiba vra wat hy wou eet. En ek het dit waardeer dat Ghadaffi so bedagsaam was. Die gesprekke het maar net bestaan uit hoflikhede en ’n algemene opinie oor wat in daardie stadium in die wêreld aangaan. Die gesprek sou altyd terugkeer na Lockerbie en die Broeder Leier se ontevredenheid oor die Weste wat nie hul beloftes om die sanksies op te hef nagekom het nie. Wanneer Madiba ook al na die VSA gereis het, sou dit ook iets wees wat hy aan die Amerikaners noem.

Terug by die huis het ons gou weer by ons besige roetine ingeval. Een dag sou ons ’n ete bywoon van die Suid-Afrikaanse Sakekamer en

Nasionale Afrika-Kamer van Handel, en die volgende dag verteenwoordigers van die Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut saam met ons neem om ’n skool in die Oos-Kaap te gaan besoek wat herbou moes word. Professor Gerwel het ons raadgewer en anker gebly vir alles waartoe ons ingestem het. Hy het sentraal gestaan in ons besluitnemingsprosesse. Ons het ook afskeidsgesellighede vir die ‘president’ bygewoon, hoewel dit nie duidelik was waarheen ons in die toekoms op pad sou wees nie omdat alles maar net soos voorheen aangegaan het. By een van die skoolbesoeke in Qunu was koning Buyelekhaya Dalindyebo, die koning van die Thembu-stam waarvan Madiba ’n lid was, die gasheer. Hulle het gehoop Madiba sou in Qunu aftree, maar ons het besef dat sy werklas selfs daar nie sou einde kry nie. Die mense van daardie gemeenskap het hom aanmekaar genader met hul probleme en hom beskou as iemand wat enige saak kon uitstryk, maak nie saak hoe nietig dit was nie – van iemand wat sy buurman se hoenders gesteel het tot belangrike tradisionele sake en verskille tussen stamgroepe.

Ons het graag besoeke ontvang wat gereël is deur die organisasie Reach for a Dream. Hulle het kinders gebring wat aan terminale siektes ly en wie se laaste wens dit was om Madiba te ontmoet. Madiba sou middag- en aandetes saam met ou vriende en kollegas geniet en geld insamel vir skole en klinieke en selfs vir die Bushbucks-sokkerspan. Hulle het nie baie goed in die liga gevaar nie, maar Madiba wou hulle graag help omdat hulle uit die gebied kom waar hy grootgeword het. Tussendeur sou hy gesinne van voormalige tronkbewaarders ontvang, sy kleinkinders se gradeplegtighede bywoon en probeer om ’n tydjie af te knyp saam met mevrou Machel. Hy sou Botswana toe vlieg om ’n eredoktorsgraad te ontvang en dieselfde aand tuis wees vir ete saam met Helen Suzman, ’n jare lange vriendin en ondersteuner van die Progressiewe Federale Party. Sy is sedertdien oorlede. Hy het hom glad nie aan die stywe pas gesteur nie. Hy wou aanhou om soveel werk as moontlik te doen en het ses-en-twintig uur in vier-en-twintig uur ingepas.

’n Maand later was ons weer op pad oorsee. Waar ons in die verlede die volle steun van die departement van buitelandse sake en voordele van die diplomatieke diens geniet het, moes ek nou alles self reël: van programme onderhandel met gashere oorsee, vergaderings met

presidente en hooggeplaastes reël, besprekings doen vir BBP-vertrekke by lughawens en motors wat deur oorsese regerings vir ons gebruik verskaf is, tot verblyf, mediabetrekkinge ensovoorts. Wanneer ons tuis was in Johannesburg het ek altyd begin planne maak vir die volgende oorsese reis. Ek dink Madiba was net eenvoudig versot daarop. Hy het uitnodigings aanvaar sonder goeie rede. Hy het oral na geleenthede gesoek om geld in te samel vir die stigting.

As ek ooit sou waag om te sê 'ek kan iemand anders saam met u stuur', sou hy kapsie maak. Nie omdat hy my voorkeurbehandeling wou gee nie, maar omdat hy vertrou het dat ek sou weet wat om te doen in enige situasie waarin hy hom bevind. Ek was nie bang om vir 'n minister of 'n senior amptenaar te sê 'dis genoeg' wanneer ek op Madiba se gesig kon lees dit was wat hy van my verlang nie. Ons is gewoonlik oorval met mediaversoeke vir Madiba terwyl ons oorsee gereis het en ek moes dit meestal van die hand wys omdat hy eenvoudig nie die pas kon volhou nie. My verdedigingsmeganismes was permanent in snelrat. Ek het die rol vertolk van die aktrise wat ek altyd wou word. Ek het dinge gedoen wat ek vir niemand anders sou gedoen het nie, maar in hierdie geval het die persoon en sy posisie dit vereis.

Madiba het Prof gebel en hom vertel van ons voorneme om die Midde-Ooste te besoek. Hulle het voorheen al heelwat hieroor gepraat en strategieë uitgewerk oor watter lande besoek kon word en watter agendas om voorop te stel. Soos wat Madiba ons ware noord was, was Prof polities gesproke Madiba se ware noord wanneer dit kom by strategie en beplanning. Madiba het Prof se insig en intellek bewonder, al het hy Prof beskou en behandel soos 'n eie seun.

Iran was ons eerste bestemming. Ek het myself bedek uit respek vir die Moslemkultuur en sover as moontlik uit die kalklig gebly. Ons is na 'n ete by president Mohammad Khatami se woning genooi. Dit was 'n volwaardige paleis, soos 'n mens sou verwag. Ek moes dadelik fotograwe met flitskameras van Madiba weghou. Dit was wêreldbekend dat Madiba se oë baie sensitief was as gevolg van die skade weens die skerp ligweerkaatsing in die steengroef waar hy feitlik agttien jaar lank tydens sy gevangenskap op Robbeneiland kalksteen uit die grond moes kap. Wanneer sy oë aan te veel flitskameras blootgestel is, het hulle rooi en tranerig geraak en dan

moes hy selfs in die aand binnenshuis ’n sonbril dra. Ons was almal baie beskermend oor sy oë en ons het geweet hoe om ferm vir fotograwe te sê hulle moet ophou. Dié keer was dit natuurlik my plig en ek het dit gedoen, al was ek die enigste vrou in die omtrek.

President Khatami het gesien hoe ek die fotograwe hanteer, maar toe Madiba eers in die woning was, het ek agter by ons groep ingeval om nie te opsigtelik tussen al die mans uit te staan nie. Ek wou niemand aanstoot gee wat ongemaklik was met my teenwoordigheid nie. Ek was die enigste vrou in die paleis. Madiba en president Khatami is begelei na ’n vertrek op ’n ander verdieping waar hulle privaat kon gesels en eet. Ek het in ’n ander vertrek my plek by die veiligheidswagte en dokter ingeneem waar ons ete bedien sou word. Na omtrent tien minute is ons kos aan ons voorgesit. ’n Paniekbevange huiskneg het my kom roep en gesê ek moet hom teen die trappe op volg na die vertrek waar Madiba en die president was. Ek het gedink Madiba het my net laat roep omdat hy my, soos hy gewoonlik gedoen het, aan die president wou voorstel, seker ook maar om hulle gemaklik te laat voel met my teenwoordigheid. Dit het hy toe ook gedoen toe ek bo by hulle aankom, maar toe sê hy vir my president Khatami dring daarop aan dat ek by hul tafel kom sit. Ek was baie ongemaklik en het nie geweet wat van my verwag word nie. Dit was amper soos die keer in 1995 toe ek langs koningin Noor gesit het. Die enigste verskil was dat ons hierdie keer net drie mense aan tafel was, en ek was blootgestel aan die oordeel van twee politici, ’n huidige en ’n gewese president.

President Khatami het aanhou uitvra oor my agtergrond en die Afrikaanse kultuur. Dit was amper asof Madiba nie daar was nie. Ek het van die vrae na hom probeer verwys, maar Madiba was vasbeslote om die antwoorde aan my oor te laat terwyl hy sy maaltyd in vrede geniet. Hy sou net soms sy kop knik asof hy met my saamstem en sodra die president ’n vraag aan hom stel, sou hy dit ook na my verwys en sê: ‘Zeldina, wat dink jy?’ Om die ondervraging tot ’n einde te bring, was ek lus om te sê eintlik dink ek niks, maar dit was ondenkbaar. Dit was seker die minste wat Madiba ooit tydens ’n ete aan tafel gesê het.

Ek onthou my verbasing tydens ’n staatsbesoek aan Frankryk in 1995 oor die feit dat presidente goed sou bespreek soos die pryse van

in- en uitvoerprodukte wat destyds tot piesangs en lemoene beperk was en hoeveel Airbuses Suid-Afrika bereid was om van Frankryk te koop. Maar hier in Iran het die hele gesprek om die Afrikaanse kultuur gedraai. Madiba het die uitvraery duidelik baie geniet en my net af en toe met ’n glimlag ondersteun. Jare daarna sou hy grappenderwys vir mense sê hoe belangrik ek was en my terg en die storie oorvertel van die president van Iran wat daarop aangedring het om my na hul tafel toe te nooi. En ek dan sou sê Madiba wou maar net sy kos in vrede geniet en het my maar aan my lot oorgelaat. Dis die terggees wat hy was. Altyd ’n storie en ’n oomblik om te onthou.

Ek moes ook programme vir ons besoeke oorsee saamstel en ek moes altyd seker maak dat ons polities korrek optree. Hier in Iran sou dit net gepas wees dat ons ’n kranslegging by die gedenkterrein van die gestorwe ajatolla Khomeini by ons planne insluit. Ek onthou dat ek gedurende my kinderjare vir die mense agter die Ystergordyn moes bid, en toe ek gevra het wat die Ystergordyn was, is daar na kommunistiese lande verwys en na die mense wat onder die verdrukking van ajatolla Khomeini moes leef. Nou het ek kransleggings by die ajatolla se graf gereël. Daarna het ons die voormalige president ajatolla Rafsanjani asook Sy Eminensie ajatolla Ali Khamenei, die hoofleier van Iran, besoek. Aangesien ek ook die enigste vrou by hierdie geleentheid was, het die hoofleier my in ’n vertrek vol fotograwe raakgesien. Die fotograwe was besig om die twee belangrike persone wat langs mekaar sit af te neem. Die ajatolla, wat geweet het ek is die enigste vrou in die lokaal, het hardop gevra: ‘Wie is die jong dame daar agter?’

Madiba het geweet hy praat van my en sonder om eers in my rigting te kyk, het hy opgewonde geantwoord, wel wetende dat hy my in die verleentheid sou stel, en gesê: ‘O, dis Zeldina, my sekretaresse.’

Ek wou nog oogkontak met Madiba maak sodat ek met my oë vir hom kon aandui dat hy my asseblief nie moet roep nie. Maar hy het hierdie sein verwag en met opset weggekyk. Ek het gevoel asof ek nie daar hoort nie, maar ek het geluister toe die ajatolla my beveel om langs Madiba te sit, nader aan hom, waar hy my kon sien. Hulle het waarskynlik nie geweet wat ’n wit vrou saam met die beroemde swart vryheidsvegter daar maak nie.

In hierdie soort situasie het ek nie omgegee wie politiek gesproke

reg of verkeerd was of wie se ideale progressief was nie. Ek was net besorg oor die volgende vyf minute, gevolg deur die volgende vier-en-twingtig uur, van Madiba se lewe waarin ek moes seker maak dat alles so gereël word dat dit hom die beste sou pas. Met militêre presisie. Hoewel my basiese begrip van die wêreld verbreed het, was daar nie ruimte in my lewe om aandag te skenk aan die politieke verwikkeldhede van die lande wat ons besoek het nie. Tot my spyt vandag.

Van Iran is ons na Damaskus in Sirië waar ons die bejaarde president Hafez al-Assad ontmoet het. Dit was net 'n paar jaar voor sy dood. Ons het ook sy seun ontmoet. Hy was destyds 'n indrukwekkende jong man. Die jong president Basjar al-Assad was duidelik te lank aan die bewind en tans word hy uitgedaag deur rebelle wat hom wil dwing om van die mag afstand te doen. Wanneer Madiba van mense gepraat het wat nie van hul posisies wou afstand doen nie, het hy altyd gesê hulle is magsdronk. Wanneer 'n staatshoof op hierdie manier uitgedaag word, dink ek altyd aan daardie woorde, of hulle nou van toepassing is of nie.

Van Sirië af het ons na Israel gevlieg nadat ons eers in Jordanië moes land. Weens die spanning tussen Sirië en Israel kon ons nie reguit na Israel vlieg nie. Wanneer ek ook al by Madiba sou kla oor die politieke probleme waarmee ons opgesaal is omdat ons altyd die regte ding probeer doen het, sou hy vir my sê: 'Nee, Zeldina, hierdie goedjies maak die lewe net interessant.' Hy wou hê ek moet moed skep, maar ongelukkig het dit op daardie oomblik nooit vir my interessant gevoel nie.

Met ons aankoms in Israel het die polisie ons soos skape deur 'n dwingbaan na ons motors toe aangedryf. Hulle het amper vir my en Charles, ons dokter, agtergelaat. Die manier waarop hulle ons hanteer het, het my geïrriteer. Dit was een van baie kere dat ek moes verduidelik wie ek is en waarom ek en die dokter so naby aan Madiba moes bly. Dit was asof hulle gedink het ons wil eenvoudig naby hom wees, sonder enige rede. Dit was die uitdaging daarvan om sonder 'n afvaardiging te reis. Net ek, die dokter en 'n veiligheidswag. Jy moes jou pad oopveg. Daar was nooit iets soos 'n plan B nie en Madiba was jou enigste oorweging. Eers wanneer jy in die situasie was, kon jy aan jouself en aan die ander personeel dink. In my privaat lewe hou ek nie

van konfrontasie nie, maar in situasies soos hierdie word ek 'n ander mens; ek speel weer die aktrise wat ek wou word en ek probeer om almal te beskerm.

Ons het in die King David-hotel tuisgegaan en op die eerste aand het ek vir Madiba vleis bestel vir aandete en vir my 'n slaai met kaas in. Kort na my oproep aan kamerdiens het 'n werknemer van die hotel my deurklokkie gelui. 'Dame,' het hy vir my gesê, 'ek wou net aan u verduidelik hierdie is 'n kosjer hotel en jy kan nie kaas en vleis in dieselfde vertrek hê nie. Ons laat dit nie toe nie.' Ek het regtig nie die krag gehad om nog oor kos ook te stry nie. Ek het maar saam met Madiba gesit terwyl hy eet en my slaai met kaas later in my eie kamer gaan eet.

Die volgende oggend het ons oudpremier Yitzhak Rabin se graf besoek. Daar is mense wat meen hy sou 'n skikking tussen Israel en Palestina kon bewerkstellig as hy nie vermoor is nie. Daarna het ons president Ezer Weizman en toe die premier, Ehud Barak, besoek. Ek het van president Weizman gehou. Premier Barak was onverdraagsaam teenoor Madiba en ek het nie van hul interaksie gehou nie.

Ons het op die Via Dolorosa in die ou stad van Jerusalem gestap. Vir my as Christen was dit aandoenlik toe ek hoor dat Jesus sy kruis op hierdie pad gedra het. Hulle het 'n groot bohaai gemaak oor Madiba wat die Via Dolorosa stap en feitlik nie vir hom plek gelaat om gemaklik op die straatklippies te loop nie. Ons was besorg dat hy oor die klippies kon struikel en sy reeds beseerde knie verder sou seermaak. Hy was reeds onstandvastig op sy voete. Ek het die antieke klippies aangeraak en toe vir ons gids gevra: 'Bedoel jy Jesus het op hierdie presiese klippies gestap?'

'Nee,' het hy geantwoord. 'Daar is glo omtrent sewentien verdiepings bo-op die oorspronklike pad gebou, maar dis min of meer die pad wat hy gestap het.' Ek was erg teleurgesteld.

Daarna is ons na die Holocaust-museum. 'n Mens stap getraumatiseerd en diep ontstem daar uit. By die uitgang het iemand 'n mikrofoon voor Madiba se gesig gedruk en gevra wat hy van die museum dink, al het ek aan joernaliste voor die gebou verduidelik dat Madiba nie bereid was om vrae te beantwoord nie. Hy het nooit daarvan gehou om in 'n hoek gedruk te word nie en enige onverwagse

gebeurtenisse het hom geïrriteer. Sy antwoord was eenvoudig: ‘Hierdie is ’n tragedie wat die Joodse nasie getref het, maar ons moet nooit uit die oog verloor dat die Duitse mense ook ’n las dra nie. Die huidige generasie Duitsers sukkel om die stigma van hierdie gebeurtenis af te skud, al was hulle nie hiervoor verantwoordelik nie.’ Die Israeli’s het nie sy woorde waardeer nie. ’n Mens kon dit sterk aanvoel en dit het my ongemaklik gemaak. Met ons tuiskoms het Madiba verskeie briewe ontvang van sy Joodse vriende van so ver as Amerika, wat erg onsteld was oor hierdie kommentaar wat hy gelewer het.

Die volgende dag was hy in ’n vergadering met die president en die premier. Hulle het politiek gepraat en Madiba het vasgestaan by sy voorstel vir ’n oplossing vir die Midde-Oosterse konflik. Al twee kante moes hierdie voorwaardes nakom voor hulle sou kon skik: 1. Israel moes Palestina as ’n onafhanklike land erken. 2. Palestina sou Israel moes erken binne sy afgebakende grense. 3. Die partye moes ’n bemiddelaar vind wat deur albei lande vertrou word. Madiba het dit aanhou herhaal, maar niemand wou luister nie. Madiba kon nie deurdring tot premier Barak of die minister van buitelandse sake, David Levy, nie. President Weizman was ouer en ’n bietjie meer oop en minder aggressief in sy reaksie op hierdie voorstelle.

Van Israel af is ons Palestina toe vir ’n ontmoeting met Jasser Arafat, wat ons toe al paar keer vantevore gesien het. Hy het baie eerbiedig teenoor Madiba opgetree, maar teen dié tyd het almal se slagofferhouding my begin irriteer. Almal in die gebied het van hulleself slagoffers gemaak en ek het besluit dat dit die helfte van hul probleem was. Mense moet ’n bietjie trots en waardigheid begin voel, wat ook al in die verlede gebeur het. Beide die Palestyne en die Israeli’s was onredelik in hul pogings om ’n skikking te bereik.

Madiba het aan my verduidelik dat die konflik eintlik al in 1967 tydens die sesdaagse oorlog begin het toe Israel die Golan-hoogland, die Wesoewer en die Gasastrook beset het. Maar ek kon duidelik sien dat die situasie sedertdien vererger en verdiep het tot ’n vlak waar ons sekerlik nie ’n oplossing in ons leeftyd sal sien nie. Vir my het dit erger gelyk as apartheid. Vir meer as dertig jaar kon gesinne wat vyfhonderd meter van mekaar af woon mekaar nie besoek nie, want daar was doringdraad tussen hulle gespan. Waar daar ook al ’n

graspolletjie was, is dit as Israel se grondgebied beskou en waar daar niks was nie, is dit aan die Palestyne toegestaan. Dit was vir my moeilik om te verstaan, maar ter verdediging van Israel moet ek sê dit was ’n onredelike geskil. Die Palestyne het nie die nodige leierskap getoon om ’n antwoord te probeer vind nie. Hulle het probeer om die situasie met Suid-Afrika te vergelyk, maar die mense was uiters onredelik in hul denke.

Madiba sou die Palestynse parlement ’n dag voor ons vertrek toespreek. Professor Gerwel het die toespraak in Suid-Afrika geredigeer en ’n nuwe weergawe per e-pos aan my gestuur. Nie ek of Madiba het kans gehad om dit vooraf deur te lees nie en een of ander virus het by die rekenaarprogram ingesluip. Die laaste sin van die toespraak het met ’n wiskundige formule geëindig. Madiba het die formule, wat in woorde uitgeskryf was, gelees en hoewel ek nie die presiese besonderhede kan onthou nie, was dit iets soos: ‘Vir elke twee gelyk aan vier minus sewe maal agt. Ek bedank u.’ Ons was effens verbaas, maar na die toespraak het die hele Palestynse parlementslede opgespring en hom luidkeels toegejuig. Ons wou nie paniekerig voorkom nie. Die toespraak is tegelykertyd in Arabies getolk en miskien het die tolk nie die wiskundige formule verstaan nie, of anders het hy iets diepsinnigs daarvan gemaak. Die virus het ons verras, maar ons was geamuseer deur die feit dat niemand dit opgetel het nie. Professor Gerwel en ek het jare daarna nog hieroor gelag. Wat ons natuurlik moes doen, was om die toespraak te lees voor Madiba dit lewer, maar dit is nou een maal ’n nadeel van reis sonder ’n afvaardiging en die werksdruk en pas waaraan ons onderwerp was.

Van die Midde-Ooste af is ons Washington toe vir ’n ontmoeting met president Bill Clinton. Hy was steeds staatshoof en dit was die eerste keer wat ek die Withuis besoek het. President Clinton was sjarmant soos altyd en eerbiedig teenoor Madiba. Hy was ontspanne en het na Madiba se siening van die Midde-Oosterse krisis geluister en met die strekking daarvan saamgestem. Hy was vasbeslote om te help om ’n oplossing vir die konflik te vind. Volgens ons was president Clinton die regte persoon om die vredespoging te lei, aangesien die Israeli’s en die Palestyne hom vertrou het. Of so het ons gedink.

Ons het die aand in die Watergate-hotel in Washington tuisgegaan. Die naam van die hotel het my herinner aan die Watergate-skandaal

wat die einde van die Nixon-tydvak ingelui het en sover ek weet, het Monica Lewinsky, die vrou wat met die toekoms van die Clinton-administrasie gedobbel het, ook in een van die Watergate-woonstelblokke gebly.

Ons het aandete saam met Madiba se ou vriend Morgan Freeman geniet en die volgende dag het ons saam met prins Bandar na Dallas in Texas vertrek. Die prins het die Dallas Cowboys-voetbalspan gekoop en ons het 'n wedstryd saam met hom bygewoon. Wat 'n ervaring was dit nie! Maar om dit ligtelik te stel, dit was 'n chaotiese dag en dit het gevoel asof elke Amerikaner in die stadion Madiba se hand wou skud. Die volgende dag het prins Bandar ons na 'n tradisionele Texas-eetplek geneem waar ons taco's en tortillas geëet het. Dit was 'n nuutjie vir Madiba en ek is seker as iemand hom later daaroor sou uitvra, sou hy nie kon onthou wat dit was nie. Hy het dit baie vreemd gevind. Die kos en vreemde tradisies was nooit vir hom so interessant soos vir my nie. Hy het sy eenvoudige, tuisgemaakte Xhosa-kos verkies. Hy het meer in prins Bandar se geselskap belang gestel. Hulle het die wêreld se probleme bespreek en waarskynlik 'n paar keer gevoel hulle het wêreldvrede met welslae bewerkstellig.

Van daar af is ons na Atlanta waar Madiba 'n onderhoud moes doen met CNN, en van Atlanta is ons na Houston vir 'n toespraak by 'n universiteit. Ons moes baie dingetjies inpas, maar Madiba het elke oomblik daarvan geniet. Hy sou nooit instem om iets te doen as hy nie gevoel het hy kon nie. As daar 'n opening in sy dagboek was, sou hy 'n goeie saak vind waarmee hy dit kon vul. Omdat prins Bandar Saoedi-Arabië se ambassadeur in die VSA was, was die veiligheidsmaatreëls streng en dit was waarskynlik die naaste wat ek ooit aan 'n aanranding op 'n veiligheidswag gekom het. Met ons aankoms by die universiteit is die motor waarin ek en die dokter gereis het toegang deur veiligheidswagte geweier. Ons het ons bestuurder probeer oorreed om daarop aan te dring om dieselfde ingang as Madiba se motor te gebruik, maar hy het die verkeerspolisie se bevele gevolg. As gevolg daarvan moes ek en Charles uit die motor klim en in Madiba se rigting begin stap, omtrent seshonderd meter verder. Hoewel die afstand ons nie gepla het nie, was ons besorg oor die feit dat Madiba êrens heen kon verdwyn en dat ons nie sou weet waar om hom te kry nie.

Charles moes sy swaar dokterstas saam met hom dra en ek my vuurwarm humeur. Ons het so vinnig geloop as wat ons kon. Toe ons nader aan die gebou kom, kon ons sien Madiba en prins Bandar is reeds by die deur in. ’n Enorme Amerikaanse bleskop-lyfwag het ons voorgekeer. Ons het vir hom gesê ons moes toegang kry omdat ons deel van meneer Mandela se afvaardiging was. Hy het volstrek geweier en was nie bereid om te luister na wat ek sê nie. Hy het net gesê: ‘Nee.’ Charles het my kalm gehou en verstandig opgemerk dat Madiba uiteindelik na ons sou kom soek. Asof hy geweet het. Die volgende oomblik het Madiba in die deur verskyn. Hy het uitgestap om ons te kom soek. Iets baie vreemd vir iemand so belangrik soos hy. Dit is ironies dat die swart man moes uitstap buitetoe om sy twee wit diensknegte te kom red. Ons kon hom op die trappe sien staan en hy kon ons sien, maar die lyfwag het in ons rigting gekyk en geweier om om te draai sodat hy self kon sien Nelson Mandela was op die trappies en dat hy ons roep.

Ek was lus en gee die lyfwag ’n plathand teen sy bleskop toe prins Bandar se lyfwag, Neigfh, aangehardloop kom om ons te red. Danksy ons vorige interaksie met prins Bandar het ons Neigfh se naam geken en hy was baie vriendelik teenoor ons. Ek het na die lyfwag omgedraai en gesê: ‘Is jy nou tevrede? Moes Nelson Mandela buitetoe kom om ons te kom haal? Jy kan tog hoor ons het nie Amerikaanse aksente nie en jy kan sien die dokter het sy mediese toerusting by hom.’ As ek vandag terugkyk op daardie gebeure, besef ek hy het net sy werk gedoen en dat ek die onredelike een was, maar soms is mense net nie oop vir oortuiging nie en hulle probeer nie eens vasstel of dit wat jy sê waar is nie.

Mense sal altyd kommentaar lewer oor die vreemdheid daarvan dat Madiba ’n vurige wit Afrikaner as sy assistent aangestel het, en professor Gerwel sou sê ‘sy het gesonde verstand’ en Madiba sou byvoeg ‘met logika in eenvoud’.

Ek het verantwoordelik gevoel vir Madiba se welstand en ek dink hy het dit geweet. Hy wou altyd weet waar ons is. Ons teenwoordigheid het hom veilig laat voel in die sin dat hy geweet het ons sal verrassings en uitdagings van hom af weghou. Dit was professionele mede-afhanklikheid. Ons het ewe kwesbaar gevoel wanneer die een nie geweet het waar die ander is nie.

As gevolg van al die reise wat ons saam aangepak het, het ek en Charles goeie vriende geword en omdat ons ewe oud was, kon ons mekaar verstaan tydens ons ervarings in hierdie wêreld wat aan niemand anders bekend was nie. Soos baie van die ander dokters was Charles diep besorg oor Madiba se welstand, maar mense het grappenderwys na hom as my slaaf verwys. Madiba het net een of twee keer siek geword op reis en Charles was dus die meeste van die tyd op bystand met min ander pligte. Ons het as span goed saamgewerk en ek sou hom gereeld vra om klein takies te verrig, soos om wasgoed op te laai, koerante te soek of navraag te doen oor Madiba se kamerdiensbestelling. Of hy sou 'n geskenkie toedraai of 'n drukker soek, ensovoorts, en dis waar die grappie van hom as my slaaf ontstaan het. Ons is alewig daaroor geterg.

Ek het soms nie eens kans gehad om my tasse uit te pak nie. Die oomblik wat ek 'n telefoonoproep Suid-Afrika toe probeer maak, sou iemand in die oorsese protokolafdeling of 'n hotelwerknemer aan my deur kom klop met 'president Mandela dit' en 'president Mandela dat'. Ek was die een wat altyd deur hulle genader is wanneer hulle met ons groep in verbinding wou tree. Charles moes soms by my deur waghou om my kans te gee om een ding op 'n slag af te handel. Die druk was genadeloos. Dit het soms vir my gevoel asof dit my mal maak, maar dan het mense soos hy die druk verlig deur die klein dingetjies by my oor te neem. Hy was die enigste ander semi-permanente spanlid. Dokters het ook geroteer om saam te reis, maar ons dolle reisplan het beteken dat nie almal van hulle bereid was om hul eie daaglikse mediese werksaamhede te verwaarloos om saam met ons te kom nie. Ons veiligheidspanne het ook beurte gemaak en dit het nie baie gebeur dat dieselfde span ons op twee agtereenvolgende reise vergesel het nie. En wanneer jy soveel tyd saam met iemand deurbring, begin hulle soos familie voel.

Ons was baie moeg toe ons na Suid-Afrika terugkeer, maar ons het die weelde van prins Bandar se vliegtuig tot ons beskikking gehad en ons almal kon op ordentlike beddens slaap. Dit was altyd 'n groot bederf om prins Bandar as gasheer te hê en ons het gesien dat hy geen moeite of koste ontsien het om seker te maak dat ons die beste kos en diens ontvang nie. Hy was 'n welwillende gasheer, het Madiba se ouderdom altyd in ag geneem en hy het ook baie respek vir Madiba as

mens gehad. Dis iets wat ek op my beurt hoog op prys gestel het.

Terug in Suid-Afrika het Madiba ’n paar invloedryke Joodse mense soos Elie Wiesel in die Verenigde State gebel om hulle te waarsku teen Joodse leiers wat hard probeer om Amerika te oortuig om Israel se kant te kies. Hulle sou nie ’n vreedsame oplossing kon vind tensy die bemiddelaar neutraal was nie.

Ons het verneem president Thabo Mbeki was ontevrede oor Madiba se besoek aan die Midde-Ooste. Die besoek het nie met sy diplomatieke agenda geklop nie. Dit was een van daardie gevalle waar Madiba by *iemand* ongewild sou wees, wat hy ook al doen. Hy wou graag vredespogings in die Midde-Ooste aanhelp en is gevra om daartoe by te dra, maar president Mbeki en die Suid-Afrikaanse regering se gevoelens oor dié netelige kwessie het swaarder geweeg as Madiba se goeie bedoelings. As ek nou daaraan terugdink, voel ek dit was verkeerd van ons om op ’n vliegtuig te wil spring om die konflik in die Midde-Ooste te probeer beëindig. Dit was duidelik dat druk daaroor van buite tot konflik tussen belanghebbendes in Suid-Afrika sou lei. Dit was Madiba se lojaliteit teenoor sy vriende wat ons in hierdie situasies laat beland het.

Nelson Mandela is op 6 November 1999 amper dood saam met sy span.

Ons was in Postmasburg in die Noord-Kaap. Dit was vroegsomer en baie warm. Gauteng, ’n somerreënvalgebied, is bekend vir intense donderstorms in die namiddae. Ons het vroeg probeer klaarmaak, maar later opgestyg as wat ons wou vir ons vlug terug na Pretoria. Ons was op pad na Waterkloof, die militêre lugmagbasis, in ’n King Air, ’n ligte tweeskroef-vliegtuig. Ons het die regering aanhoudend probeer oorreed om ’n straalvliegtuig tot Madiba se beskikking te stel, maar president Mbeki en sy adjunk was baie besig. Die straalvliegtuie was daarom permanent tot hul beskikking en Madiba was nie meer ’n prioriteit nie. Op dié dag was ’n straler in elk geval buite die kwessie weens die kort landingstrook in Postmasburg.

Omtrent dertig minute voordat ons sou land, het die vlieënier in sy stoel omgedraai en my na die stuurkajuit geroep. Hy het vir my gesê Waterkloof en die O.R. Tambo Internasionale Lughawe is gesluit as gevolg van ’n donderstorm en dat ons dalk elders sou moes neerstryk.

Ek het die boodskap aan Madiba oorgedra. Hy het kalm in sy stoel vasgegordel gesit en elke beweging van die vlieëniers dopgehou. Die vlug het kort daarna stamperig begin raak en spanning het opgelaai. Van waar ek sit, kon ek Madiba se gesig en die vlieënier se kommunikasie dophou. Dit het dringend geraak. Die vlieënier het die beheertoring laat weet dat ons spoedig sou moes hoor waar ons kon land, aangesien die brandstof besig was om min te raak. Al die lughawens in die omtrek was toe. Soos ons deur die wolke klief, het die stamperigheid vererger. Soms moes die vlieëniers die stuurstang los en die vliegtuig se bewegings aan die onstuimige lug oorlaat. Dit was angswekkend.

Madiba het ’n frons op sy voorkop gehad en sy lippe was saamgepers. Wayne Hendricks, een van die lyfwagte, het grappies gemaak om die spanning te probeer verlig. In die begin was dit nogal snaaks, maar toe word ek kwaad omdat ek paniekerig begin raak het. Wayne het ’n innemende en prettige manier gehad om spanning met sy humorsin te verlig en dit was gaaf van hom om te probeer, maar in dié geval was dit ’n klaaglike mislukking.

Madiba het nie ’n woord gesê nie. Een van sy kleinseuns wat ook op die vlug was, het half naar gelyk toe ons ’n lugholte tref wat die vliegtuig skielik ’n paar meter laat daal het. Die inhoud van my handsak het deur die kajuit getrek en ons het vasgeklou vir al wat ons werd is. Die kleinseun se selfoon het uit sy bo-sak gebons en ook deur die lug getrek. Wayne het die foon voor in die vliegtuig uit die lug raakgevang soos lyfwagte mos maak. Ek kon hoor die vlieëniers raak ook paniekerig en hulle was vasbeslote om op Waterkloof te land. Nooddienste is op ’n gereedheidsgrondslag geplaas. Teen dié tyd het die trane onbeheersd by my wange afgeloop. Ek het gesnik. Wayne het my getroos en probeer oortuig dat alles sou regkom, maar vir my was dit moeilik om te glo dat ons lewend hieruit sou kom. Uiteindelik het ons geland. Die vlieëniers was natgesweet toe hulle die vliegtuig tot stilstand bring. Madiba het sy hand op my skouer gelê en gesê: ‘Toemaar, Zeldina, ons is nou veilig.’ Ons het afgeklim, in ons motors geklim en Houghton toe gery.

Nadat ons in Houghton aangekom het, het ek dadelik koers gekies huis toe, maar net toe ek om die blok ry, ontvang ek ’n oproep van Xoliswa, wat baie jare lank ’n sjef by Madiba se huis was. Sy het gesê

Madiba wou graag hê ek moet terugkom en ’n koppie koffie saam met hom drink. Sy kleinseun het nog saam met hom in die sitkamer gesit. Madiba het gesê ek moet sit en hy kon duidelik sien ek was nog geskok. Hy het gesê: ‘Zeldina, vandag was ’n aaklige ervaring. Ons moet so gou moontlik daarvan vergeet en ek dink die beste vir ons sal wees om gou weer op ’n vliegtuig te klim.’ Hy het gesê dit was soos om van ’n fiets af te val. ’n Mens moet so gou moontlik weer in die saal wees. Hy het voortgegaan: ‘Ek wil nooit weer in ’n klein vliegtuigie iewers heen vlieg nie, en ek wil nooit weer saam met een van my kleinkinders op ’n vlug wees nie.’ Wat hy geïmpliseer het, was dat die risiko in ’n klein vliegtuigie te groot was en dat hy nie sou wou hê een van sy kleinkinders moet by wees indien enigiets met hom sou gebeur wat hul lewe in gevaar sou stel nie. Van daardie dag af het ons geweier om in ’n skroefaangedrewe vliegtuig te reis. Dit het ons in onguns by die lugmag laat beland, aangesien hulle nie ’n groot vloot straalvliegtuie besit het nie en gereeld vliegtuie moes huur. Dit het bygedra tot ’n stram atmosfeer tussen ons en die presidensie, maar ná ons ervaring was ek nie bereid om ’n kompromie aan te gaan nie.

Jare later sou ons ook in ’n helikoptervoorval betrokke wees. Madiba was op pad na ’n gebied in die Transkeise platteland waar bouwerk aan skole en klinieke gedoen is. Een van die vlieëniers het sy kommer uitgespreek omdat iets in die enjin oorverhit het. Hulle het geglo hulle sou dit kon regmaak nadat ons geland het en was nie vreeslik bekommerd nie. Hulle was oortuig hulle het die fout reggestel, maar ons was angstig oor die terugvlug. Ons het ons veiligheidsmense daarvan in kennis gestel en net nadat ons opgestyg het, het hulle per motor koers gekies in die rigting van Mthatha waarheen ons ook op pad was. Maar na omtrent vyftien minute in die lug het daar olie uitgespuit tot teen die ruite. Ons kon nie meer deur die vensters sien nie en dit was duidelik ’n olielek, wat natuurlik ’n brandgevaar ingehou het. Die vlieëniers het gesê hulle moet land en het die Oryx-helikopter stadig grond toe laat sak.

Hulle het in ’n oop stuk veld geland en aangesien die hele gebied onbewoon was, was daar geen huise of mense in sig nie. Terwyl ons besig was om te land, het ek die veiligheidsmense wat op pad was lughawe toe, gebel en gesê ons moes ’n noodlanding uitvoer. Ons was nie ver van die pad af nie en terwyl hulle aangery kom, kon hulle ons

in die veld sien. Hulle het omtrent twintig minute later daar aangekom, maar terwyl hulle op pad was, was ek besorg oor ons teenwoordigheid in die gebied. Die gemeenskap sou nie weet waarom ’n helikopter met swaargewapende lyfwagte in die middel van nêrens land nie. Die vlieëniers het die fout probeer herstel maar kon dit nie regkry nie. Ons het in die motors geklim en Mthatha toe gery, van waar ons vlug na Johannesburg sou vertrek. Madiba het geglo daar was dalk sabotasie betrokke, maar ek het hom oortuig dat ek nie gedink het dit was die geval nie.

Groot partytjies is wêreldwyd vir die wending van die millennium beplan en Suid-Afrika sou deelneem aan die feesvieringe. In dié tyd het spanning tussen Madiba en president Mbeki opgelaai. Ons het gerugte gehoor dat meneer Mbeki gemeen het Madiba gedra hom soos ’n staatshoof. Madiba het gedoen wat hy nog altyd gedoen het. Hy het aan allerlei versoeke voldoen en probeer om almal tevrede te stel, en hoewel ons nie met al sy besluite saamgestem het nie, was hy die kaptein van sy eie noodlot, die meester van sy siel, soos hy die gedig ‘Invictus’ uit sy tronkjare aangehaal het, en hy wou aanhou doen wat sy siel gelukkig maak. Dit was moeilik om te fokus op dit wat hy vir die tyd na sy presidentskap beplan het. Mense oor die wêreld heen het aanspraak op sy tyd gemaak. Hulle het gevoel hulle is geregtig daarop omdat sommige van hulle hom in die stryd teen apartheid bygestaan het. Hulle het sekere dinge van hom verwag. En hy sou gretig instem omdat hy ook gevoel het hy is iets aan hulle verskuldig. In die geheim het ek gedink hy hou maar net van reis en nadat hy so lank toegesluit was, dink ek dit was normaal dat hy soveel wou rondrits as moontlik in ’n poging om verlore tyd in te haal. Die gevolg van hierdie invloede, wat die doel daarvan ook al was, was dat dit hom aangedryf en nou en dan in die moeilikheid laat beland het.

Ek was nie seker hoe diep die sogenaamde onenigheid tussen Madiba en president Mbeki was en hoeveel daarvan in ander mense se verbeelding afgespeel het nie. President Mbeki het hom byvoorbeeld in November 1999 gebel en gevra of hy die onderhandelings in die oorloggeteisterde Burundi sou lei. Ek het gevoel Madiba kon nie nog werk by sy bestaande las voeg nie, maar hy het ingestem. As gevolg van Madiba se ingryping in Zaïre tydens sy presidentskap het ek aanvaar president Mbeki het gemeen dit sou makliker vir Madiba

wees om vrede te beding danksy die ondervinding wat hy destyds met die gebeure in daardie land opgedoen het. President Mbeki se mikpunt was ook om vrede in Afrika te bewerkstellig, aangesien dit ekonomiese voordele vir Suid-Afrika sou inhou. Ek het ook gedink dit was dalk 'n manier van die regering om Madiba elders besig te hou, en dat so 'n groot taak hom daarvan sou weerhou om in te meng soos hy in die Midde-Ooste gedoen het of by sake aan die tuisfront.

Ek het simpatie met president Mbeki gehad. Daar is van hom verwag om die skoene van 'n geskiedkundige figuur vol te staan. Tog het ek gevoel dis die ANC wat bygedra het om hierdie figuur te skep deur hom as 'n simbool van bevryding van die onderdruktes te identifiseer, en dit was verkeerd van die ANC om nou te voel Madiba tree verkeerd op. In die openbaar het Madiba by sy punt gehou dat Suid-Afrika nog nooit 'n beter president of eerste minister in sy hele geskiedenis gehad het as president Mbeki nie. Soms het ek gedink president Mbeki dink dalk Madiba smeer hom heuning om die mond. Maar Madiba het bedoel wat hy sê en jare later sou sy mening hieroor duideliker na vore tree. Ons land was nog nooit ekonomies so stabiel soos wat dit was ná meneer Mbeki se presidentskap nie, en as gevolg hiervan kon ons die wêreldwye ekonomiese krisis in die laat 2000's weerstaan.

Daar was nooit kwade bedoelinge in enigiets wat Madiba gedoen het nie en ook niks opsetlik nie, en daar is geen rede om te glo Madiba het probeer om die president te ondermyn nie. Hierdie doemprofete het hul eie onsekerhede openbaar gemaak. Ek sal nooit weet of dit die president self of sy personeel was wat hierdie indruk geskep het nie. Madiba sou gereeld vra of hy met die president kan praat en hy is altyd belowe dat sy oproep beantwoord sou word, maar dit het nooit gebeur nie. Ek het gevoel mense is besig om onverdraagsaam te raak teenoor die bejaarde Madiba. Ons sou afsprake met die president aanvra, maar moes altyd hoor hy is te besig. Die ANC moes eintlik 'n agenda vir Madiba opgestel het, maar ek verstaan dit was moeilik juis omdat Madiba so 'n sterk wil van sy eie gehad het en vasbeslote was om te doen wat sy hart vra.

Alan Pillay, die administratiewe beampte in ons kantoor tydens Madiba se presidentskap, was nou een van president Mbeki se private sekretarisse en tensy Alan as tussenganger opgetree het, was

kommunikasie tussen die twee bitter moeilik. Maar waar Allan by was om te help, het dinge gebeur en goed uitgewerk sonder dat politiek bygesleep is.

In die openbaar was dit egter moeilik om te bestuur. Madiba het hard probeer om seker te maak dat hy altyd goeie dinge van die president sê. Wanneer hy en die president saam was, is die taak aan my opgelê om seker te maak dat Madiba die nodige respek sou betoon en protokol sou volg om seker te maak niemand kan ons daarvan beskuldig dat ons die president op enige manier ondermyn nie. Dit was moeilik omdat mense en die publiek nog steeds vir Madiba staande sou toejuig en die luidste verwelkom en ’n groot bohaai oor hom maak.

Die president en Madiba sou saam wees by die viering van die nuwe millennium op Robbeneiland. Eers is ons mondelings uitgenooi en daarna het ons gehoor die president sou daar wees. Ons het die uitnodiging van die hand gewys juis omdat ons bang was Madiba se teenwoordigheid sou die president in ’n moeilike posisie plaas. Ons het toe ’n oproep van die presidensie ontvang wat bevestig het dat die president self vir Madiba daar wou hê. Madiba het weer nee gesê. Ons moes hom oorreed deur vir hom te sê al sy ou kamerade sou daar wees en dat dit belangrik vir hom was om soontoe te gaan omdat die feesvieringe wêreldwyd regstreeks uitgesaai sou word. Uiteindelik het hy ingestem.

Dit was ’n pragtige aand op Robbeneiland en ek onthou dat ek mense terug in die tent moes jaag om hulle sodoende te dwing om respek aan die president te betoon. Ons wou nie hê hulle moes ons volg terwyl ons gereed gemaak het om te vertrek nie. Hulle wou agter Madiba aankom terwyl die president nog binne was. Dit was disrespekvol en onvanpas. Ek het al hoe ongewilder geraak, maak nie saak wat ek gedoen het nie. Hoewel ek lojaal teenoor Madiba probeer wees het, moes ek sorg dat hy eerbiedig teenoor die president voorkom, maar die publiek het dit soms moeilik gemaak. Ek moes dit op so ’n manier doen dat Madiba nie ontoereikend sou voel nie en dat hy steeds die respek sou afdwing wat hy verdien. Selfs die kleinste dingetjie wat ek doen het in ’n komplekse situasie ontaard waarin ek alle moontlikhede moes ontleed wat enigeen voorgestel het. Dit het

baie energie en emosionele vaardighede geverg om almal tevrede te hou en te doen wat reg is. Maar dan moes jy vasstaan by jou besluit en doen wat jou werkgewer van jou verwag, ondanks die kritiek en politiek wat ek moes verduur. Ek moes leer om nie ’n lafaard te wees nie.

Mense sou gereeld aan Madiba skryf en vra om in te meng by sake wat duidelik die taak van ’n president is. Wanneer ek dit sou regstel en hulle na die president se kantoor verwys, is ek gereeld daarvan beskuldig dat ek oorbeskermend teenoor Madiba was of hom beheer het. Hulle het my sy oppasser genoem en ek het dit met ’n glimlag aanvaar. Maar daar was baie goed waarby Madiba self nie betrokke wou raak nie. Hy wou aanhou om geld vir liefdadigheid in te samel om skole en klinieke te behou, maar ook die vryheid hê om te sê wat hy wil oor sake waarvoor hy welbekend was: moraliteit en menseregte. Mense het op Madiba se aandag en persoonlike ingryping aangedring en wat ek ook al gedoen het, was ’n verlore stryd.

Madiba was alom bekend as ’n uitstekende geldinsamelaar. Hy het miljoene dollars vir die ANC ingesamel nadat die party in 1990 gewettig is. Nou was sy fokus op liefdadigheid. Die heerser van Doebai het ingestem om sy stigting te ondersteun, maar ’n Suid-Afrikaanse diplomaat in Doebai het ingemeng en die poging het misluk. Ons kon maar net raai waarom daar ingemeng is en namens wie die diplomaat opgetree het.

In die begin kon ek nie uitwerk hoekom dit vir Madiba so maklik was om geld in te samel nie, maar nadat ek hom in aksie gesien het, het ek verstaan. Die sleutel is dat ’n mens moet glo in die doel waarvoor jy geld insamel.

Iets wat ek oor die jare heen baie vreemd gevind het, was ’n storie wat Madiba baie keer oorvertel het en met groot moeite aan president Mbeki en ander ANC-amptenare oorgedra het. Madiba was nooit ’n baie goeie administrateur nie en het mense werklik vertrou totdat die teendeel bewys is. Dit sou my verstom hoe hy sy geldinsameling-rympie opgesê het en die eenvoud waarmee hy die proses benader het. Terwyl hy geld ingesamel het vir die ANC sou dit eenvoudig van die een amptenaar na die ander oorhandig word en hy het nooit enigiemand in die proses wantrou nie.

Dis ’n reëling wat vir my prakties en sinvol gelyk het. Madiba sou

die geld ontvang en aan Tom Nkobi, die tesourier-generaal van die ANC, oorhandig om in ’n rekening in te betaal. (Wanneer ons geld ingesamel het, het hy geweier om dit self te ontvang en hy sou daarop aandring dat die geld regstreeks in die stigting of die kinderfonds se rekenings inbetaal word, wie dit ook al was wat hy probeer help het.) Madiba was vir sewe-en-twintig jaar uit die samelewing verwyder en het niks van banksake of beleggings geweet nie. Wanneer hy die storie vertel, sou ek hom dan vra of enigiemand boekgehou het van die geld. Ek is nie ’n wantrouige mens nie, maar het dit verbasend gevind dat Madiba self nie geweet het hoeveel geld hy ingesamel het nie.

Vir hom was daar nooit enige twyfel dat die geld hul eindbestemming bereik het nie. Maar hy sou dan byvoeg dat Tom Nkobi later skielik aan onbekende oorsake dood is. Ek weet nie hoe dit presies verband hou met die geldinsameling nie, maar ek het daaroor gewonder en saans wakker gelê om my te probeer indink wat daar gebeur het. Madiba het ons vertel dat hy herwaarts en derwaarts gestuur is wanneer hy probeer vasstel het wat Tom se skielike siekte behels het, en toe hy daarin slaag om hom in Durban in die hospitaal te besoek, is hy nie ’n enkele oomblik alleen saam met Tom gelaat nie. Madiba het die Indiër-verpleër wat Tom opgepas het as ’n vreemde kêrel beskryf. Hoewel Tom in Johannesburg gewoon het, is hy tydens sy siekte Durban toe gestuur, al het Johannesburg van die wêreld se beste mediese praktisyns.

Toe die Suid-Afrikaanse sakeman Schabir Shaik van korrupsie en bedrog aangekla is, het ek opgemerk dat sy maatskappy toevallig Nkobi Holdings genoem is. Maar Madiba was besorg oor die destydse adjunkpresident, Jacob Zuma, se vriendskap met Shaik. ’n Mens kan dit seker ’n sesde sintuig noem, ek weet nie. ’n Deel van die bedrogaanklag teen Shaik was dat hy lenings van meer as $150 000 wat hy aan Zuma gemaak het, afgeskryf het. In Suid-Afrika is ’n mens verplig om belasting te betaal op enige skenking wat meer as $10 000 per jaar beloop. Mense het gesê die geld is aan Zuma gegee om tenders vir ’n omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse wapenkontrak vir die aankoop van artillerie van wêreldgehalte te beïnvloed.

Shaik is skuldig bevind aan korrupsie en tydens die hofverrigtinge het die regter gesê daar bestaan ’n korrupte verhouding tussen hom en Zuma.

Madiba het sy allerbeste probeer om hierdie saak met verskeie ANC-amptenare te bespreek. Ons het meer as drie of vier keer agter amptenare aangehardloop om 'n geleentheid te probeer skep waar Madiba die saak aan hulle kon verduidelik en vra dat hulle ondersoek instel. Niemand het hom ooit na hom teruggekeer daaroor nie en ek is stadig maar seker aan die skynheiligheid van politiek voorgestel. Hulle sou voor hom sit en na hom luister en soms selfs met hom saamstem, net om nooit weer terugvoering daaroor te gee nie. By derduisende geleenthede sou ek hoor hoe hy vir skares tydens toesprake sê dat mense nie dinge moet doen wat hul eie belange bevorder nie, maar lojaal bly aan die einddoel, hul beginsels en aan hul gewete. Vandag sien 'n mens al hoe meer van die dubbele standaarde waarteen hy gewaarsku het. Dis so al asof hy dit sien kom het. Party mense het hulle passie vir die party en sy doelwitte verloor, naamlik om alle mense te verteenwoordig. Dit het in 'n selfsugtige, eiegeregtige oorlog in Suid-Afrikaanse politiek ontaard waar eiebelang die enigste agenda is, en dít het die kanker van korrupsie geword.

Ons het Arusha in Tanzanië besoek as deel van Madiba se onderhandelings in die Burundi-vredesproses. Ná Arusha is ons New York toe. Dit was my eerste besoek aan dié stad. Ons het in die Waldorf Astoria-hotel tuisgegaan en ek onthou die grootte van die kamer het 'n indruk op my gemaak. Ons was gaste van die Amerikaanse ambassadeur by die Verenigde Nasies, Richard Holbrooke, en het nie in die gewone deel van die hotel tuisgegaan nie. My ervaring van New York was beperk tot 'n ware Waldorfslaai in die Waldorf-hotel en 'n besoek aan die VN. Aangesien ons geen protokol- of mediabeamptes in ons diens gehad het nie (dit was net ek), was ek meer vasberade as ooit om in die hotel te bly ingeval enigiets met Madiba sou gebeur of as hy my sou nodig kry.

Madiba wou graag met ambassadeur Holbrooke praat om geld in te samel, maar ook om die dinge te bespreek wat hy die vorige jaar tydens sy besoek aan Israel en Palestina aangeraak het. Verder wou hy hom inlig oor die situasie in Burundi. Tydens ons besoek het Holbrooke 'n onthaal in sy woonstel gehou. Dit was die eerste keer dat ek Whoopi Goldberg ontmoet het. Madiba het vir my gesê dat sy in die apartheidsjare baie gedoen het om die regering teen te staan. Sy het in 1989 'n kragtige toespraak by die welbekende Free Mandela-

konsert in die Wembley-stadion in Engeland gelewer.

Ek dink ook met deernis terug aan my eerste ontmoeting met Robert de Niro. Hy het sy vrou, Grace, en sy pragtige seuns saamgebring om met Madiba kennis te maak. Madiba was geheel en al ontspanne, maar een van die seuns wou niks met hom te doen hê nie. Oor die jare het ek tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat Madiba feitlik in ’n fantasiekarakter omskep is as gevolg van al die mediablootstelling. Kinders het nie geweet hoe om teenoor hom op te tree nie en het gewoonlik nie gedoen wat hul ouers van hulle verwag het nie. Dis baie soos kinders se reaksie wanneer hulle karakters soos Kersvader of iemand wat soos ’n Disney-karakter aangetrek is êrens ontmoet. Robert het sy seun eenkant toe getrek en vir hom gesê: ‘Jy gaan hierdie vir die res van jou lewe berou, gedra jou nou.’ Die sewejarige seuntjie het nie verstaan wat sy pa bedoel nie en ek en Madiba was geamuseerd deur Robert se pogings om sy seun sover te kry om op te tree soos hy wou hy hê hy moes en hom te oortuig dat dit vir hom waardevol sou wees in die toekoms. Die kind het eenvoudig geweier om saam te werk.

Die Verenigde Nasies, ’n instelling waarvoor Madiba groot respek gehad het, is baie indrukwekkend. Ons het Kofi Annan, die destydse sekretaris-generaal, ontmoet en ek kon duidelik wedersydse respek tussen die twee mans aanvoel.

Madiba sou ’n onderhoud voer met Larry King op CNN. Toe ek met die produksieleiers onderhandel het, het ek hulle ’n hele paar keer gevra om vir my ’n stel vrae aan te stuur of onderwerpe wat bespreek sou word, aangesien Madiba graag voorbereid wou wees op die onderhoud. Hulle het geweier en gesê Larry verskaf nooit vooraf sulke materiaal nie. Ek het dit so aanvaar. Dit was nie een van Madiba se beter onderhoude nie en dit het nie in Larry se guns getel nie. Madiba het bot voorgekom en sy antwoorde was kort en saaklik – baie anders as wat ons hom ken, en sy warmte as mens het verlore geraak. Die vrae wat hy gevra is, het hy beantwoord, maar daar was nie regtig rapport tussen die twee nie. Die produksieleiers was duidelik meer daarop ingestel om ’n onderhoud met Madiba op Larry se CV te sit as om goeie inhoud te skep. Laasgenoemde is wat hulle sou gekry het as hulle hom kans gegee het om beter voor te berei. Dit was baie anders as sy ervaring met Oprah Winfrey. Sy was warm en vriendelik en het

sy werk ondersteun en haar span het met graagte vooraf onderwerpe aangestuur, en as gevolg daarvan het Madiba met groter gemak geantwoord.

Joernaliste het almal soortgelyke vrae gevra wanneer hulle onderhoude met Madiba gevoer het, of selfs as hulle in lang gesprekke met hom by geleenthede betrokke was. Hulle het hom een van 'n paar vrae gevra en sy antwoord was altyd omtrent dieselfde, maar hy sou dit aanpas by die omstandighede. As hulle sou vra: 'Wat beskou u as die karaktereienskappe van 'n goeie leier?' sou hy sê: 'Iemand wat sy mense dien' en dan sou hy daarop uitbrei. Mense sou hom vra: 'Is u nie bitter nie? En het u nie berou na al die jare in die tronk nie?' Dan sou hy antwoord: 'Van al die emosies is berou die grootste mors van tyd omdat 'n mens niks kan verander nie. Ek het die keuses gemaak wat ek gemaak het omdat hulle destyds my siel gevoed het.' Dan sou hulle ook gereeld vra: 'Hoe sou u onthou wou word?' En hy sou sonder versuim sê: 'Ek sal daardie antwoord oorlaat aan mense om self te besluit hoe hulle my wil onthou.' Ek het gedink dis snaaks. Hy kon gesê het hy sal onthou wil word as 'n menseliefhebber of iemand wat sy mense gedien het, of wat ook al, maar hy wou dit aan ander oorlaat om te besluit en nie aan hulle voorskryf nie.

Na sy dood in 2013 het ek agtergekom hoeveel mense stories oor hom te vertel het. Party daarvan was heeltemal ongeloofwaardig en het nie ingepas by hoe ek hom geken het nie. Maar toe is ek herinner aan sy wens dat mense die vryheid moet hê om hom te onthou soos hulle wou en ek het dit spesifiek so gestel in 'n onderhoud. Ongeag of hul herinneringe goed of sleg was of selfs fiksie, was wat regtig getel het hoe hulle in hul harte gevoel het wanneer hulle sy naam hoor.

Ons het gedurende die besoek aan die VSA ook die woonplek van die magnaat George Soros besoek. Madiba het 'n skenking aan die stigting van hom versoek. Ongelukkig was dit vrugteloos en ons is met leë hande terug New York toe. Ek het later verneem Soros was nie oortuig deur die werk van die stigting of die rigting waarheen ons op pad was as organisasie nie; daarom was hy versigtig om geld by te dra. Ek het gevoel sy verduideliking was geregverdig. Die stigting was daarop gemik om Madiba se veranderde agenda te dien. Eers was dit skole en klinieke en sy kantoor na sy tydvak as president, en hoewel laasgenoemde so gebly het, het sy fokus na vigs en onderwys verskuif

en later is dialoog ook bygevoeg. Dit was vir mense verwarrend omdat ons voortdurend die stigting se missie verander het.

Ons (ek, die dokter en die veiligheidspan) het gereeld vir Madiba in wagkamers van paleise, luukse hotelle en huise gewag wat ons voorheen net in rolprente gesien het. Die eerste paar keer bewonder 'n mens ander se welslae en die weelde, maar later word 'n huis net 'n huis en jy let bittermin detail op. Grootsheid tref jou later nie meer nie. My enigste sorg was dat daar nie trappe moes wees nie, aangesien Madiba moeilik trappe geklim het, en dat hy nooit alleen in moeilike situasies gelos moes word nie. Ons moes albei naby genoeg wees sodat hy ons kon roep indien daar probleme opduik. Ek het hom gewoonlik op sy gemak gestel voor 'n vergadering en dan sou ek die tyd begin dophou. Hy wou nooit langer as dertig of veertig minute op enige plek deurbring nie en hy het gewoonlik vinnig tot die punt gekom. Indien ek nie in die vertrek by hom was nie, wat ek gewoonlik probeer vermy het aangesien ek ander dinge wou doen terwyl ek buite wag, sou ek ná dertig minute ingaan om vir hom te sê hy moet 'n ogie op die tyd hou. Hy sal dan grappenderwys vir sy gasheer of gasvrou sê: 'Nee, u sien, hierdie is my baas en ek moet luister, anders gaan ek my werk verloor.' Die mense sou vreemd na my kyk met 'n uitdrukking wat sê 'o, dis snaaks' of 'o ja, die wittes was mos die apartheid-regime, ek is seker hulle doen nog hierdie tipe van ding.' Dit het hulle heeltemal verwar. Ek het gewoonlik gelag om die spanning te probeer verlig, aangesien nie almal geweet het wat om van sy grappie te maak nie. Dus, of dit nou snaaks was of nie, ek het 'n laggie geforseer om vir mense te wys dis net 'n grap. As hy twintig minute na my eerste aankondiging nog binne was, sou ek hom weer gaan herinner, en dié keer sou hy sonder versuim opstaan en aankondig dat dit tyd was om te vertrek.

Hy het soms ook van my verwag om hom te 'red'. By sommige vergaderings sou hy my laat roep om te vra hoeveel tyd oor was, en dit sou 'n aanduiding aan my wees dat ons nie moet toelaat dat dinge te lank voortsleep nie. Tyd was soos altyd 'n kompetisie tussen my en ander mense. Nie vir Madiba nie, maar vir buitestanders wat gevoel het hy moes langer bly en dat hy oneerbiedig optree. Om soveel mense te probeer tevrede stel, sou 'n mens ses-en-dertig uur per dag moes hê en dit was eenvoudig onmoontlik. Maar hy was nooit iemand

wat iets teen sy sin sou doen nie. Hy was ’n natuurlike leier en die soort mens wat altyd in beheer wou bly, selfs wanneer hy ander mense laat voel hul insette is uiters belangrik in sy besluitnemingsproses. Hy was baie sterk op dissipline ingestel, maar daar was ook ’n sterk wil wat aan hardkoppigheid gegrens het.

Van 28 April 2000 het ons Bujumbura in Burundi besoek. Dis een van die mooiste stede in Afrika, omring deur bome en ’n pragtige landskap. Ongelukkig is die paaie en infrastruktuur tydens die burgeroorlog beskadig en daar sou baie gedoen moes word om nie net die infrastruktuur te herstel nie, maar ook die vertroue van potensiële buitelandse beleggers. Daar was spanning in die lug en hoewel die mense van Burundi baie bly was om Madiba daar te ontvang, moes ’n mens versigtig wees om nie tydens die onderhandelings met enige spesifieke party vereenselwig te word nie. Ons het tot binne-in die oorlogsone gereis, waar Madiba met vlugtelinge gepraat het en hulle die een ding gegee het wat mense nodig het: hoop.

Op 3 Mei 2000 het ons ’n besoek van een dag aan Londen gebring om die koninklike hof aan te doen nadat Madiba deur sy vriendin, koningin Elizabeth, as koninklike raadgewer aangewys is. Ons het regtig probeer om hom te oorreed om nie net vir een dag Londen toe te reis nie, maar hy het daarop aangedring. Hy wou sy warm vriendskap met die koningin eerbiedig. Ek dink hy was een van baie min mense wat haar op haar voornaam genoem het, en dit het gelyk of dit haar amuseer. Hierdie interaksies het my vermaak. Toe mevrou Machel hom eenkeer uitvra en vir hom sê dis nie gepas om ’n koningin op haar voornaam te noem nie, het hy gesê: ‘Maar sy noem my dan Nelson.’ By ’n ander geleentheid het hy vir haar gesê: ‘O, Elizabeth, jy het gewig verloor.’ Dis nie iets wat enigiemand vir die koningin van England kan sê nie.

Ons het gereis soos sakelui wat gereeld vir ’n dag Europa toe vlieg. Maar dit was moeilik vir Madiba omdat hy besig was om oud te word en die logistiek was nie so eenvoudig soos om op ’n vliegtuig te spring vir ’n besoek van een dag aan ’n ander land nie. Die rede waarom ons net een dag kon bly, is dat hy die volgende dag ’n afskeidsete ter ere van doktor Mamphela Ramphele by die Universiteit van Kaapstad sou bywoon. Sy is aangestel by die Wêreldbank en sou Kaapstad verlaat. Sy was die eerste mediese dokter wat na sy gesondheid omgesien het

nadat hy uit die tronk vrygelaat is, en sy het hom na van die beste kardioloë in Suid-Afrika verwys.

Maak nie saak hoe besig jy is nie, om jou gaan die lewe voort. Dokter Ismail Meer, 'n goeie vriend en kollega van Madiba, is oorlede en ons het Durban toe gevlieg vir 'n laaste eerbetoon. Dit het my bygeval dat al hoe meer van sy vriende afsterwe en hy het dit sekerlik ook gesien, wat verontrustend moes wees vir iemand van sy ouderdom. Hy het so baie mense geken en dit sou gereeld gebeur dat ons op twee agtereenvolgende naweke begrafnisse bywoon. Nietemin is dit van hom verwag. Niemand het gedink oor die uitwerking wat dit op 'n bejaarde mens moet hê om amper elke naweek 'n begrafnis by te woon nie.

In Mei 2000 is ons op versoek van die skatryk Suid-Afrikaanse sakeman Johann Rupert Monaco toe. Johann het 'n privaat vliegtuig vir die vlug soontoe verskaf, waar ons die eerste Laureus-sporttoekennings bygewoon het. Ons het prins Rainier en die jong prins Albert ontmoet. Dit was ons eerste ontmoeting met die sanger Bono, wat deur Naomi Campbell aan ons voorgestel is. Dit het my 'n tydjie geneem om aan Madiba te verduidelik wie Bono is en dat hy Suid-Afrika geboikot het met sy musiek tydens apartheid, en dat hy 'n musieklegende van my generasie is. Dit was vir my hartseer om Monaco te verlaat. Ek is 'n Grand Prix-geesdriftige en dit was net een dag voor die kwalifiserende rondes in Monaco. Ons kon hoor hoe die Formule 1-motors in die strate getoets word en ek was teleurgesteld dat ek so naby daaraan gekom het om 'n Grand Prix by te woon, maar ons kon eenvoudig nie bly nie.

Teen die einde van 2000 is Madiba na Australië uitgenooi om die konferensie 'What Makes a Champion' by te woon. Hy sou ook eredoktorsgrade van die Universiteit van Sydney en die Universiteit van Tegnologie ontvang. Wanneer hy voorberei het vir die ontvangs van eredoktorsgrade moes ons altyd vooraf sy mates aan die universiteit stuur vir sy akademiese toga, die grootte van sy kop ingesluit. Wanneer ek gevra het of ek sy mates kan neem, was hy verdraagsaam maar hy wou dit so vinnig moontlik agter die rug kry. Hy was nie die geduldigste mens wanneer iemand om hom kloek nie. Hy sou instem maar my aanjaag om klaar te kry.

Teen dié tyd het ek al só baie verander en ek was gemaklik by hom.

Hy het gemaak dat ek al my vooroordele teenoor swart mense laat vaar het. Ek het groot deernis vir hom gehad, soos 'n mens vir jou bejaarde grootouers het. Wanneer ek hom ook al 'n dag lank nie gesien het nie, sou ek hom soengroet as ons mekaar weer sien. Later het dit elke dag geword, selfs al het ek hom twee dae na mekaar gesien. Hoe het ek nie verander nie! Ek het na hom begin verlang wanneer 'n enkele dag verbygegaan het wat ons nie saamgewerk het nie. Hy het baie keer aan my vasgehou wanneer ons stap, of my hand gevat wanneer ons teen trappies moes afklim. Ek kon aan sy hare vat sonder om daaroor na te dink en ek het probeer orde skep wanneer die wind of 'n hoed dit deurmekaargekrap het. Ek het baie verander en ek was kwaad oor die vooroordele waarmee ons grootgemaak is.

Madiba was altyd goed versorg en het groot moeite gedoen om seker te maak sy vel was bevog, en ek onthou hoe ek soms tydens sy presidentskap gesukkel het om 'n spesifieke soort vogroom in die hande te kry wat toe nie in Suid-Afrika op die mark was nie – eenvoudige Palmer's Body Lotion wat hy gebruik het terwyl hy in die tronk was. Ek dink die maatskappy het vir 'n rukkie opgehou om dit in Suid-Afrika te versprei en ons moes mense in die Verenigde State vra om dit op groot maat vir ons aan te koop en hierheen te stuur. Dieselfde geld vir die oogdruppels wat hy verkies het: Refresh Plus, in die blou-en-wit houer. Hy was baie nougeset oor sekere dinge.

In Australië sou hy 'n huldigingsbesoek aan die premier, John Howard, bring en 'n vergadering met die beroemde en ryk Packer-familie hou oor 'n donateur-internetportaal om geld vir die Nelson Mandela-kinderfonds en die stigting in te samel. Pogings om die Packer-familie te oorreed om geld te skenk was onsuksesvol. Ek weet nie hoekom nie.

Die vlug Australië toe was vir hom vermoeiend en die kaptein in beheer van ons kommersiële vliegtuig het aangebied dat Madiba op 'n behoorlike bed in die bemanning se ruskamers slaap. Ek het gedink dis baie vriendelik van hom en ons was uiters dankbaar.

Nadat ons ons tuisgemaak het in Sydney en gewoond geraak het aan die tydsverskil, het ons Madiba na die stad se beroemde dieretuin toe geneem. Ons is toegelaat om kameelperde te voer en babakangaroes en koalas vas te hou en te kyk hoe dingo's eet. Ek is vas oortuig ons sou nie hierdie voorregte geniet het as ons nie in

Nelson Mandela se geselskap was nie. Ons het in ’n boot verby die Operahuis gevaar en daarna middagete aan huis van premier Howard geniet. Hulle het oor die Aborigine-vraagstuk gepraat en Madiba was onder druk om nie die Australiese regering se behandeling van dié mense te kritiseer nie. Hy het gesê wat hy altyd sê, en dit is dat hy na die klagtes van mense sou luister, maar nie sou inmeng in die binnelandse vraagstukke van ’n ander land nie. Hy sou erkenning aan hulle gee en die nodige respek toon, maar hy sou nie by omstrede sake ingesleep word nie. Dit was kort voor die Olimpiese Spele in Sydney en ons het die Suid-Afrikaanse span in die Olimpiese dorpie besoek, waar Madiba met hulle gepraat het en sy beste wense aan hulle oorgedra het.

Van Sydney af is ons Canberra toe, waar ons deur die goewerneur-generaal ontvang is. Hy is die gelyke van ’n staatshoof. Ons het in ’n pragtige gastehuis tuisgegaan waar ’n mens deur die venster na die kangaroes kon kyk terwyl jy jou ontbyt nuttig. By hierdie geleenthede, en wanneer ek en Madiba saam geëet het, sou hy al sy kennis oor ’n bepaalde onderwerp met my deel. Wat kangaroes aanbetref, het hy vir my ’n lang les gegee oor hul buidelsakkies en ander feite met my gedeel tot ek ’n vraag gevra het waarvan hy nie die antwoord geken het nie. Dit was gewoonlik die einde van ’n spesifieke gesprek. Hy het nie daarvan gehou as ek hom moeilike vrae vra nie.

Ons het Melbourne ook besoek en dit het duidelik vir my geword dat ’n mens nie maklik kon verstaan waarom soveel Suid-Afrikaners Australië toe getrek het om ’n nuwe lewe daar te begin nie. Terwyl ’n mens in regeringsgastehuise tuisgaan, kan jy nooit werklik ’n goeie oorsig van die lewe in ’n ander land vorm nie.

Tuis was die druk besig om op te bou. Madiba se tyd was meer gesog as ooit tevore. Hy was besig om almal en alles se redder te word. Indien die regering nie mense se kwelvrae kon oplos nie, sou hulle hul tot Madiba wend. Hy is gesien as die persoon wat enige plek kon ingryp en enige probleem kon oplos. Mense het hom met die status van ’n ‘heilige’ opgesaal. Dan sou hy hulle herinner: ‘ ’n Heilige is ’n sondaar wat aanhou probeer.’ Ek is versot op daardie sêding.

Soms sal mense aan hom skryf uit frustrasie wanneer die regering nie hul probleem kan oplos nie. Ons sou nooit inmeng by sake soos diensverskaffing of iets wat duidelik die regering se prerogratief was

nie. Ons het nie die drang of die tyd gehad nie en soms was dit ’n bestiering dat ons eenvoudig nee kon sê. Ons moes verstaan: Wanneer mense hulle tot Nelson Mandela wend, was dit feitlik altyd ’n laaste desperate poging, ongeag hoe gefrustreerd ons as administrateurs was en ongeag die eindelose papierwerk. Selfs mense wat uit die tronk geskryf het moes die waardigheid van ’n antwoord gegun word, al was dit net ’n erkenning dat hulle bestaan. Een ding wat ek nie op my gewete wou hê nie, is iemand wat selfmoord pleeg of dat iets met iemand moet gebeur as gevolg van ons onkunde as ons nie ’n brief beantwoord nie, of dit eenvoudig ignoreer.

Omdat Madiba ’n openbare figuur was en ’n besluit geneem het om in die openbare oog te bly, het hy ’n verpligting teenoor die publiek gehad. My kollegas kon nie verstaan hoekom ek daarop aandring om mense se korrespondensie te erken nie, selfs as ons nie kon help of nie belang gestel het nie. Ons het tonne briewe van mense ontvang wat skole, klinieke, medisyne, finansiële hulp, beurse of enige ander tipe hulp nodig gehad het. Soms was dit eenvoudig iets soos ‘Liewe meneer Mandela, kan u asseblief vir my ’n fiets koop?’ Volgens die skrywer van elke brief was Madiba die enigste hoop vir hul kwellinge, of dit armoede, onderwys, spesiale vraagstukke of dispute was. Hy was nog steeds hul president en president van die wêreld.

Besluite het gewoonlik neergekom op dit waarvoor Madiba lus was. Omdat hy niemand wou teleurstel nie, kon hy nooit self vir enigiemand nee sê nie. Iemand moes dit doen en dit was ek. Ek het gereeld op professor Gerwel gesteun vir raad en leiding, maar uiteindelik was dit gewoonlik Madiba wat self besluit het. Soms het iemand by ’n vergadering met hom gepraat en hom dan oortuig om nog ’n reis aan te pak. Madiba het net soveel skuld hieraan gehad. Hy kon soms nee gesê het, maar hy was gek na reis. ’n Mens sou kon sê dit was belaglik. Ons was uitgeput. Niemand anders van sy ouderdom sou so ’n strawwe reisprogram onderneem met soveel afsprake soos wat hy gemaak het nie. Tog sou hy nooit kla dat hy moeg was nie en het hy altyd nog geleenthede gesoek om te reis. Sy pligte sou nooit end kry nie.

Benewens die vredesproses in Burundi en die skole- en kliniekprojek (asook sy pogings om die hele wêreld tevrede te stel), moes Madiba ook luister na die eise van leiers in die landelike gebied waar hy

vandaan kom. So het dit toe gebeur dat hy 'n oproep van die hoof van die Pondo's, koning Thandizulu Sigcau, ontvang het. Die oproep was kort en op die man af: 'Ek het beurse nodig sodat my dogters in die VSA kan studeer.' Dit was die einde van die gesprek en daar is nie 'n enkele ander woord gesê nie. Madiba het geweet wat om te doen, dus het hy twee beurse deur Coca-Cola gereël. Sy verhouding met die Pondo-koning was vreemd en ek het gesukkel om tradisionele sake te verstaan. Wanneer ons oor Kersfees in Qunu was, sou koning Thandizulu altyd opdaag met 'n skaap as 'n geskenk aan Madiba vir Kersfees. Dit het baie vir Madiba beteken.

Die koning se dogters het hul studies in die VSA met welslae voltooi en ons almal trots gemaak. Hulle is rolmodelle uit eie reg en het nie die geleenthede wat aan hulle gebied is vermors nie, maar aangegryp en baie hard gewerk. Ongelukkig is die koning in 2013 oorlede terwyl Madiba in die hospitaal was en ons kon nie 'n laaste eerbetoon aan hom bring nie. Ek behou steeds kontak met die gesin.

In 2000 het ek dertig geword. Dit was 'n emosionele tyd vir my en ek het gedink my jeug is verby. Dis hoe laf 'n mens tog op daardie ouderdom kan raak. Madiba het vir my gelag en natuurlik geterg. Hy sou my keer op keer met 'n breë glimlag op sy gesig vra hoe oud ek in Oktober word, en ek sou elke keer sê dertig. Hy het dan gelag en gesê: 'O nee, jy is nog baie jonk.' Hy sou aspris maak asof hy vergeet, net sodat hy my kon terg. Ek het glad nie meer jonk gevoel nie en elke keer as hy my vra, het dit my ontstel. Hy het geweet, maar hy was gek daaroor om my siel uit te trek en hy het dit nooit lelik bedoel nie. Hy sou ook altyd vra: 'Hoeveel kêrels het jy nou?' en ek sou altyd sommer enige getal uitdink. Soms wanneer ek by die kantoor opdaag, sou hy my vra of ek al my kêrels gebel het en ek sou saamspeel en sê daar is een of twee wat ek nie in die hande kon kry nie, maar na die res het ek omgesien. My antwoorde het ons al twee lekker laat lag. Hy het standaardvrae aan al die vroue in sy personeel gestel en mense op verskillende maniere geterg. Sy humor was altyd teenwoordig.

Deur die jare het ek oor baie dinge nagedink en besluit dat ek selfs vandag in my veertigs emosioneel onvolwasse is as gevolg van die stres en druk van die jare. Ek was baie jonk om die dinge te ervaar wat ek het en die druk te absorbeer wat ek moes. Ek het nooit 'n normale verhouding aangeknoop nie. Vandat ek vir Madiba gewerk

het, was dit altyd werk, en wanneer ek nie gewerk het nie, het ek gerus. Ek was nooit in aanraking met jong mense in die hoofstroom nie. Die enigste uitsondering was my kollegas. Maar ek was ook nooit lank genoeg op dieselfde plek sodat ek stabiele platoniese vriendskappe kon aanknoop nie. As gevolg hiervan was daar heelwat doodgewone goed wat ek nooit kon baasraak nie. Maar ek het politiek goed begin verstaan en ek het verstaan hoe die wêreld werk. Ek het na Madiba omgesien en die kuns vervolmaak om die logistiek en reëlings rondom die beroemdste mens in die wêreld te tref, en dit was my enigste sorg. Nietemin sal ek nooit die ervarings en geleenthede van my werk saam met Nelson Mandela vir enige ander voorregte verruil nie.

President P.W. Botha het weer gebel. Dit het gelyk of hy vasbeslote was om Nelson Mandela persoonlik aanspreeklik te hou vir sy wrokke en griewe oor die hedendaagse Suid-Afrika. Baie mense wat nie die nuwe Suid-Afrika aanvaar nie, doen dit. Wanneer enigiets verkeerd loop, plaas hulle die skuld op Madiba se skouers. Mense soek altyd ’n sondebok of iemand vir wie hulle kan sê ‘ek het jou mos gesê’ wanneer dinge nie in hul guns verloop nie. Vir wit mense wat die mag moes oorhandig, is dit altyd ’n uitweg om oorkrities teenoor ’n swart regering te staan wanneer dinge hulle nie meer pas nie. Hulle kon altyd sê swart mense is onbevoeg en nie in staat om ’n land te regeer soos wat hulle sou kon nie. Party mense hou eenvoudig net daarvan om te kla. Hulle hele lewe bestaan daaruit. Daar is ’n verskil tussen regte kommer oor diensverskaffing en onbevoegdheid en om net te kla omdat kla kla is. Dis deel van menswees, en dit bemoeilik die rassekwessie.

Op ’n dag het iemand van meneer Botha se huis gebel en gesê hy wil met Madiba praat. Ek het teruggebel en die twee met mekaar in verbinding geplaas. Ek was nooit meneer Botha se grootste ondersteuner nie, en omdat hy nooit vir Madiba op ’n eerbiedige manier aangespreek het nie, was ek altyd op die agtervoet wanneer hy bel. Wanneer enigeen Madiba eenvoudig ‘Mandela’ of ‘Nelson’ genoem het, het my nekhare orent gestaan. Tog was Madiba oorvriendelik en hoflik teenoor meneer Botha. Dit het my herinner aan die bekende stelling wat Madiba gemaak het: Dis makliker om ander te verander as om jouself te verander. Ek moes werk aan die manier waarop ek na

meneer Botha gekyk het. Madiba het werklikwaar geen wrokke gekoester nie. Dis hoekom hy vriendelik kon wees teenoor sy voormalige vyande.

Hulle het ’n kort gesprek gevoer waarna Madiba my gevra het om die minister van polisie te kontak. Hy het vir my gesê meneer Botha het gekla omdat die getal lyfwagte wat aan hom as voormalige predisent toegesê is onvoldoende was, terwyl Madiba en meneer F.W. de Klerk die voorgeskrewe getal lyfwagte gehad het. Na my mening word ’n mens minder bedreig hoe ouer jy word en hoe minder jy in die openbaar beweeg, hoe minder lyfwagte het jy nodig. Ek kon glad nie sien hoekom dit Madiba se probleem was nie. Ek het nietemin gedoen wat ek aangesê is.

Ons het die minister gebel en Madiba het gevra dat hy die saak ondersoek. Madiba het ook aan meneer Botha belowe dat ek hom binne ’n paar dae met ’n vorderingsverslag sou bel. Twee dae later het meneer Botha weer gebel: ‘Juffrou, wanneer is ek veronderstel om ’n verslag van Mandela te ontvang?’ Nie ‘hoe gaan dit’ of enigiets nie, net dit. Ek het met opset klem op die titel geplaas en gesê: ‘Meneer Botha, *meneer* Mandela het met die minister gepraat en ons wag op terugvoering. Ek is seker meneer Mandela sal antwoord sodra hy van die minister hoor.’ Hy het daarop aangedring dat ek Madiba daaraan moes herinner om met ‘hulle’ te praat; dis natuurlik die regering. Wit Suid-Afrikaners het graag na ‘ons’ en ‘hulle’ verwys. ‘Ons’ is wit Suid-Afrikaners en ‘hulle’ swart mense. Hoe meer verdraagsaam ek oor sekere dinge geword het, soos die verskille tussen mense, en om te respekteer wat ander mense glo sonder om my mening op hulle af te dwing, hoe meer onverdraagsaam het ek begin word oor die taalgebruik wat my eie mense se gebrek aan respek onderstreep.

In die ou Suid-Afrika het mense die k-woord gebruik wanneer hulle van swart mense praat. Dis neerhalend en word in die Grondwet as haatspraak gereken. Vreemd genoeg, waar ek my bevind en wanneer ek tussen familie en vriende was wat soms die k-woord gebruik het, het hulle opgehou om dit te doen, dalk net wanneer ek by was. Wanneer hulle dit wel gebruik het, sou ek hulle daaroor aanspreek en moontlik sorg dat ek hulle nie weer sien nie. Dis een ding wat ek nie meer kan verdra nie. En nie net die gebruik van daardie woord nie, maar ook mense se veralgemenings en vooroordeel wanneer dit by

swart mense kom. Die vooroordeel is nie grondig of regverdigbaar nie. Ek het my gereeld in vurige debatte oor die kwessie van respek bevind. Ek sou dieselfde doen wanneer swart mense in die sosiale media neerhalende woorde gebruik wanneer hulle oor wit mense praat, maar dit kon maklik in 'n klein oorloggie ontaard omdat ek, wat wit is, probeer om swart mense aan te spreek. Dit trek altyd die aandag van die oorspronklike argument af.

Ek het vir meneer Botha gesê Madiba het met die minister gepraat en hy het die oproep só beëindig: 'Sê vir hom ek wag.' Toe ek die foon neersit, het ek besluit: Ek dink nie so nie. Daar was regtig geen rede waarom ek hieroor aan Madiba moes verslag doen en hom ontstig nie. Ek het geweet hy wag vir die minister en dat die minister wel sou optree. Twee dae later het meneer Botha met dieselfde vrae gebel en dieselfde bevele gegee. Dié keer het ek vir Madiba vertel en hom gevra of hy nie met meneer Botha sal praat nie. Ek het gehoop dit sou hom kalmeer en dat hy sou ophou om my te bel. Maar Madiba het nee gesê. Ek kon nie glo wat ek hoor nie en ek het gelag vir sy antwoord. Ek het eers gedink hy maak 'n grap, maar hy was doodernstig. Hy was nie bereid om my of meneer Botha te help nie. Hy wou eenvoudig nie weer met hom praat nie. Einde van die storie. En ek het geweet wanneer Madiba so voel oor iets, mors jy jou tyd as jy hom probeer ompraat of verwag dat hy van plan verander. Hy het selde op hierdie manier gereageer en wanneer hy dit wel gedoen het, het jy geweet dis sy finale woord. Ek weet nie of die saak ooit opgelos is nie, maar meneer Botha het nie weer gebel nie. Ek het die saak daar gelaat en ek was min gepla oor die getal lyfwagte wat hy het. Dit is asof hy vir Madiba probeer sê het: 'Ek het die onderhandelings begin wat tot jou vryheid en die wettiging van die ANC gelei het en nou het ek nie eens genoeg lyfwagte nie.' Meneer Botha wou Madiba selfs hiervoor verantwoordelik hou. Wel, die manier hoe jy iemand of 'n saak benader sal bepaal hoe jy hanteer word.

Ons het aan al hoe meer vredesendings oor die wêreld heen begin werk. In Maart 2001 was ons op reis na Seoel om met die premier van Suid-Korea te praat oor die idee van 'n Vredespark wat Noord- en Suid-Korea sou verbind. Die Vredesparkstigting onderhandel en skep bewaringsgebiede wat oor nasionale grense heen strek. So dra hulle by om ekologiese omgewings te herstel. Madiba was die beskermheer van

die Vredesparkstigting wat deur prins Bernhard van Nederland en doktor Anton Rupert gelei is. Prins Bernhard en doktor Rupert was baie goeie vriende en hulle het saam die Wêreldnatuurfonds met groot welslae gestig en dit met die Vredesparkstigting opgevolg. Tydens ons besoek aan Suid-Korea was president Kim Dae-joeng ontvanklik vir die idee, maar hy het getwyfel of Noord-Korea hieraan sou meedoen. Ons versoek om die voorsitter van die nasionale verdedigingskommissie van Noord-Korea vir samesprekings te ontmoet het op dowe ore geval. Kim Jong-il was Noord-Korea se heerser.

Die publiek het waarskynlik gedink Madiba was oral in die wêreld welkom. Wel, dit was nie so nie. Noord-Korea het glad nie in hom belang gestel nie. Ons het situasies probeer vermy waar ons gevoel het daar was die moontlikheid van ’n mislukking, maar as gevolg van prins Bernhard en doktor Rupert se betrokkenheid by hierdie spesifieke geval wou Madiba ten minste probeer. Ons het ’n paar dae lank in Suid-Korea gewag en toe ons agterkom die Noord-Koreane ignoreer ons, het ons eenvoudig teruggekeer huis toe. Vreemd genoeg het die feit dat ons ver van die huis af was en nie tyd aan amptelike sake kon bestee nie, in ons guns getel. Dit het ons weggehou van die waansin wat tuis op ons sou wag. Tydens dié besoek is ek weer gevra om in Madiba se kamer te wees toe die masseuse inkom om hom te behandel. Soos altyd wou ek dié taak aan een van die veiligheidsmense oordra, tot ek agtergekom het die masseuse is blind. Hoewel ek vir Madiba in Afrikaans gesê het sy is blind, was hy die hele tyd waaksaam eerder as ontspanne. Ek het gevrees dat hy haar een of ander tyd sou aansê om op te hou en ek kon my lag nie hou nie. Dis nie dat ek oneerbiedig teenoor haar gestremdheid gestaan het nie, maar dit was Madiba wat so gespanne in die situasie gelyk het. Teen my verwagting in was sy buitengewoon professioneel. Hulle sê wanneer ’n mens sonder een van jou sintuie gebore word, word van die ander sintuie oorontwikkel en ek het dit gesien. Dit was duidelik dat sy ’n uitstekende masseuse met helende hande was.

Madiba het die vreemde gewoonte gehad om sy horlosie altyd op Suid-Afrikaanse tyd te hou, maak nie saak waar in die wêreld ons was nie. Ons moes soms op die vreemdste tye opstaan om hom kans te gee om sy interne horlosie by die tydsverskil aan te pas sodat hy nie te erg aan vlugvoosheid sou ly met sy tuiskoms nie. En dan, ongeag waar ons

ons bevind, moes ons mevrou Machel elke oggend en elke aand, Suid-Afrikaanse tyd, bel. Ek onthou dat ek haar een aand nie dadelik in die hande kon kry nie en hy het wakker gebly tot ek dit reggekry het. Dit was een van daardie kosbare dinge waarop hy as getroude man aangedring het. Sy moes soggens gebel word voor sy ontbyt geniet en saans voor sy gaan slaap. 'Hoe gaan dit, Mum? Hoe was jou dag?' sou hy vra. Dit was 'n teken vir my om uit die kamer te stap en hulle 'n paar minute se privaatheid te gun voordat ons ons program of ons sake vir die dag voortsit. Dit was ook vir hom 'n geleentheid om vir Mum te sê wat ons daardie dag gaan doen.

Ons het toe danksy die welwillendheid van Mercedes-Benz Duitsland toe gevlieg, waar Madiba die Duitse Mediaprys in Baden-Baden sou ontvang. Teen dié tyd het ek 'n assistent, Marianne Mudziwa, aangestel en Maretha Slabbert het ook ingestaan waar ons haar nodig gekry het. Dit het baie van die administratiewe druk verlig. Die personeel in die kantoor het my nog steeds raad gevra oor versoeke aan Madiba. Omdat ons nie 'n protokol- en media-afdeling gehad het nie, het ek alle skakelwerk wat Madiba betref self behartig. Dieselfde het vir medianavrae gegeld. Ek het net van Madiba en professor Gerwel leiding ontvang. Ek sou Madiba soms twintig keer op 'n dag bel om raad te vra wanneer hy nie ingekom het kantoor toe nie. Hy het geduldig aan my verduidelik hoe ek wat moes doen, hoe om te reageer en antwoorde te vind wanneer hy nie antwoorde aan my kon verskaf nie.

Hy sou tot in die fynste besonderhede sy strategie aan my verduidelik en hoe hy dink 'n spesifieke twispunt aangepak moes word, of hoe hy beplan om 'n einddoel te bereik, en hy het van my verwag om haarfyn by hierdie strategie te hou. En wanneer hy gepraat het, het jy geluister. Ek het alles wat hy gesê het neergeskryf, of ten minste sleutelwoorde. Ek sou dit wat hy vir my sê gereeld herhaal en dan sou hy my reghelp of in meer besonderhede ingaan as hy gevoel het dit was nodig, of as hy vermoed het ek verstaan hom verkeerd. Woorde se betekenis sou daarna een van my passies word. Dis nie maklik vir iemand wie se moedertaal nie Engels is nie om vlot te praat en ek het besef ek sal baie versigtig moet wees oor wat en hoe ek dinge sê. Soms het ek dit reggekry en ander kere nie. Maar Madiba

was geduldig en hy sou nooit my foute uitwys nie maar dinge op ’n subtiele manier aan my verduidelik. ‘Nee, jy sien,’ sou hy begin en dit dan met ’n verduideliking opvolg. Die meeste van die tyd het ek dit reggekry. Ek kon dit nie bekostig om vir hom ’n hindernis te wees nie.

In Mei 2001 het die reis na Baden-Baden nader gekom en aangesien ek vooraf ’n uitgewerkte program ontvang het, moes ek fokus op die reëlings vir die reis en skakeling om te verseker dat verblyf, vliegtuie, treine en motors alles gereed sou wees sodat dit nie net by sy aansien sou pas nie, maar ook vir hom die gemaklikste sou wees. Spanning het opgelaai en twee dae voor ons vertrek het ek deurnag gewerk om vir ons besoek gereed te maak en om te keer dat die korrespondensie tuis ophoop.

Vlugte van Suid-Afrika na Europa vertrek in die aand en ons het op ’n Dinsdagaand Duitsland toe gevlieg. Ek het gewoonlik langs Madiba gesit as die sitplek langs hom nie oopgehou kon word sodat hy meer ruimte kon hê as mevrou Machel nie saam met ons op die vlug was nie, en op dié aand was die Lufthansa-vlug vol en ek het langs hom gesit. Ek sou gewoonlik seker maak hy is gemaklik wanneer ons aan boord is en dat hy niks nodig het om te eet of te drink nie. Dan sou ek sy bed vir die aand op die beste moontlike manier voorberei, in die eersteklaskajuit, nadat ons opgestyg het. Oor die algemeen het lugdienste moeite gedoen om vir hom spesifieke kos aan boord te hê en seker gemaak hy het genoeg kussings en komberse om gemaklik te kan wees. Nadat ek hom gerieflik ingerig het, het ek myself vasgegespe vir die opstyg en dadelik aan die slaap geraak. Ek het eers die volgende oggend wakker geword toe ons land. Ek het dwarsdeur die nag geslaap en Madiba aan sy lot oorgelaat. Ek het nie eens my tande geborsel en my gesig gewas nie, iets wat ek nooit nagelaat het om te doen nie.

Ek was vies vir myself en het die veiligheidsmense uitgevra oor sy gemak deur die nag. Die bemanning het saam met die veiligheidsmense na hom omgesien en hy was piekfyn, maar ek het my plig versuim en dit was onverskoonbaar. Ek het dae daarna nog skuldig gevoel.

Toe ek wakker word, het ek agtergekom daar is ’n kombers oor my en ’n kussing agter my kop. Toe ek die veiligheidsmense vra wie my toegemaak het, het hulle gesê dit was Madiba. Die arme man. Hier

was ek veronderstel om na hom om te sien, maar pleks daarvan het hy na my omgesien. Hy was besorg dat ek nie genoeg slaap kry nie en hy sou by professor Gerwel ook kla dat ek te hard werk – maar dit het nie beteken hy sou my ophou bel of die pas verslap nie.

Ek onthou 'n keer op 'n vlug van British Airways toe ek in die nag wakker geword het omdat ek beweging aangevoel het. Madiba is in die middel van die nag badkamer toe, met die veiligheidsmense wat 'n ogie oor hom hou. Ek het wakker gelê en vir hom gewag om na sy sitplek terug te keer en om te hoor of hy enigiets nodig het. En toe hy verby my stap, op pad na sy sitplek, het hy gaan staan en my voete met 'n kombers toegemaak. Hierdie oomblikke het my tot in my diepste wese geraak. Ek kon nie my kinderdae onthou toe my ouers my saans met slaaptyd toegemaak het nie, en hier het hierdie man, wat my mense so gevrees het tot in die laat tagtigerjare toe ons van hom bewus sou word, my voete toegemaak, besorg oor my welstand. Soms wanneer ek moeg was, sou ek saggies huil en die feit dat hierdie man soveel vir my omgee diep waardeer. Dit het vir my gevoel asof niemand so lief is vir my soos Madiba nie. Hy het my behandel asof ek deel van sy mense was en na my omgesien soos 'n mens na jou eie omsien. En my geskiedenis het gemaak dat dit feitlik onmoontlik was om te glo dat ek hierdie liefde en deernis verdien.

Daar was feitlik nooit tyd om te rus nie en ons het elke dag ure saam deurgebring. Wanneer ons sonder mevrou Machel of een van sy dogters gereis het, wou hy nie tydens etenstye alleen wees nie en ek sou by hom moes sit. Ek wou vir hom ruimte gee, maar hy het daarop aangedring dat ek terugkeer wanneer ek hom vir 'n ruk sou verlaat.

Ek het dit geniet om etenstye by hom te sit en na sy stories te luister en ook sy mening oor so baie dinge te hoor. Hy was vas oortuig dat die grootste uitdaging wat op ons mense wag onderwys was, en sy motivering vir hierdie siening het sin gemaak. Ek het al die uitdagings waardeur die regering in die gesig gestaar is, verstaan. Hulle het nie voorheen enige mag gehad nie en moes die stelsel herstruktureer en die fondse aanvul wat gebruik is om apartheid in stand te hou. Min mense besef dat die apartheidsregering geld uit die staat se pensioenfonds geleen het ten bate van apartheid en noudat daar 'n nuwe regering in beheer was, het niemand geweet waar die geld vandaan sou kom om die pensioenfonds aan te vul nie. Die ANC het

nie vooraf geweet van hierdie tekort nie en nou moes hy die beloftes nakom wat hy aan sy mense gemaak het, maar ook die geld vind om die pensioenfonds te red.

Ek het hierdie verduideliking van Madiba baie waardeer – eenvoudig en reguit in woorde wat ek kon verstaan. Dit het die manier waarop ek dink verander en ek sou spoedig die ANC in debatte met my vriende verdedig en van my konserwatiewe Afrikaanse vriende begin vervreem. Min van hulle het die nuwe politieke redenasies verstaan.

Madiba was almal se held. Swart mense het hom verafgod omdat hy hulle vrygemaak het en wit mense het van hom gehou omdat hy by die eindstryd van die Wêreldbeker-rugbytoernooi in ’n Springboktrui op die veld gestap het. Hy het daarin geslaag om die land te verenig, maar dit het nie die heel armstes se lot verlig nie. Terwyl die meeste wit mense hom teen dié tyd aanvaar het, was daar steeds ‘rassistiese kokonne’, soos hy dit beskryf het. En ongelukkig laat Suid-Afrika sy jeug steeds lelik in die steek. In 2012 het sommige skole in die verarmde Limpopo-provinsie byvoorbeeld ’n hele jaar lank nie hul handboeke ontvang nie, al het die howe, danksy die werk van ’n nie-regeringsorganisasie, die regering beveel om die boeke te versprei. Die boeke is eenvoudig nie afgelaai nie en is later in ’n pakhuis gevind. Tydens die reise en gesprekke het ek baie oor politiek en die werkinge daarvan geleer, en ook hoe die ANC bestuur word.

Van Baden-Baden af het ons na Indië gereis waar Madiba die Gandhi-vredesprys ontvang het. Ons het ook Kerala, ’n provinsie in Indië, besoek en hoewel die enorme helikopter waarin ons gevlieg het ons ’n skilderagtige blik op die landskap gebied het, was ek nie seker ons is veilig nie. (Ek dink gereeld stories met tragiese opskrifte uit wanneer ek nie veilig voel nie. Dit is laf, maar soms kan ’n mens nie help om aan hierdie dinge te dink wanneer jy so dikwels na so baie lande reis en soms groot uitdagings moet afweer nie.) Die helikopter was duidelik oud en groter as sommige vliegtuie waarin ek voorheen gevlieg het, maar in my agterkop het ek gedink die Indiese regering sou nie Madiba se lewe op die spel plaas terwyl hy in hulle land is nie. Dit het my veiliger laat voel.

Die mense van Indië was gasvry en gaande oor Madiba. As daar een ding is waarvan ek en hy ewe veel gehou het, is dit biryani, ’n Indiese

dis wat bestaan uit rys, speserye en rooivleis, hoender of vis. Madiba was gek daarna. Voor hy tronk toe is, het hy dit saam met sy Indiese vriende geniet. Dit was iets wat hy erg gemis het terwyl hy opgesluit was: hy kon nie die kos kry waarvan hy gehou het nie. In Indië het ons na maaltye uitgesien waar ons biryani of samoesas kon eet. Ek het nie geweet wat biryani was voordat hy my daaraan bekend gestel het nie, maar daarna het ek verstaan waarom hy so baie daarvan gehou het.

Tydens ’n besoek aan Ierland in April 2001 was ons gaste van Tony en Chryss O’Reilly nadat Madiba uitgenooi is om ’n geleentheid van die Independent-koerantgroep toe te spreek. Ons het berigte gehoor dat Suid-Afrika se krieketkaptein, Hansie Cronjé, by wedstrydknoeiery betrek is. O’Reilly, voorsitter van die Independent-koerantgroep en self ’n suksesvolle sportman, het die saak met ons bespreek. Ek en Madiba het vasgestaan dat dit net ’n bewering was en dat ons van sy onskuld oortuig was. O’Reilly het van ons verskil. Ons het Hansie gebel om hom voorspoed toe te wens. In die daaropvolgende dae is Hansie se skande egter op die lappe gebring toe hy die knoeiery erken het.

Die volgende jaar, op 1 Junie 2002, was ek saam met Madiba by Shambala, die huis wat deur die sakeman Douw Steyn op ’n wildplaas in die noorde gebou is en waar Madiba beplan het om sy memoires te skryf, toe ek vroegoggend ’n oproep ontvang het waarin die media my vra om kommentaar te lewer op die gerug dat Hansie in ’n vliegongeluk dood is. Ek het paniekerig geraak. Net die vorige week het ek ’n stemposboodskap van Hansie ontvang waarin hy my gelukgewens het met my verjaardag. Ek wou hom nog bel en sê hy was ligjare weg van my regte verjaardagdatum aan die einde van Oktober, maar ek het nie. Ons was vriende en ek kon nie glo wat ek hoor nie.

’n Paar uur later is die gerugte bevestig. Ek was baie hartseer toe ek die nuus aan Madiba oordra. Hansie was ’n vriendelike, sagte mens en ja, hy het foute gemaak, maar ons almal maak foute. Die laaste keer wat Madiba Hansie gesien het, was ’n jaar of so tevore nadat Hansie erken het dat hy geknoei het en lewenslank uit krieket geskors is. Hy was ’n gebroke man. Ons was destyds op Fancourt, ’n gholfoord en hotel met aangrensende landgoed, om ’n paar dae lank te rus. Madiba

het Hansie gevra om hom daar te besoek, aangesien Hansie ’n huis op dieselfde landgoed besit het. Hy het Hansie laat sit en vir hom gesê: ‘Seun, jy het ’n groot fout begaan, maar nou moet jy ’n man wees en die gevolge daarvan in die gesig staar. Dit beteken nie ons gaan jou nie vergewe nie. Jy het jou fout erken, nou moet jy aanbeweeg.’ Hansie was net besig om terug op sy voete te kom toe hy op daardie koue wintersoggend dood is. Ek het ook geleer dit maak nie saak hoe groot die fout is wat iemand anders gemaak het nie, maar as jy hulle nie kan vergewe nie, moet jy nie verwag om vergewe te word nie. Dit het my herinner aan die stuk wat Madiba in die tronk geskryf het en wat later in *Conversations with Myself* verskyn het. Hy het geskryf: ‘Moenie van jou probleme weghardloop nie, durf hulle aan. Want as jy dit nie doen nie, gaan hulle jou altyd bybly.’

Dit was ’n baie hartseer wintersdag. My pa het gebel en gesê sy kleinneef Ettienne, van wie ek baie gehou het, was in ’n motorfietsongeluk in Kaapstad. Hy moes DVD’s wat sy kinders gehuur het terugneem en het dit sommer gou per motorfiets gedoen. Hy het ’n motor van voor getref. Ettienne is ’n week later in die hospitaal dood. Dit was ’n hartseertyd en ek kon nie verstaan waarom twee sulke jong lewens so tragies moes eindig nie. Al my sinne het oorreageer en ek het daardie aand baie alleen gevoel in die groot huis. Madiba was nie ’n baie emosionele mens nie en daarom was dit moeilik om my hartseer voor hom te wys. Hy het net stil geraak; dit was sy manier om hierdie dinge te hanteer. Ek wou uiting aan my emosies gee, maar soms het dit vir my onaanvaarbaar gevoel. Ek was baie eensaam.

Terug by die huis was tyd saam met familie en sakemense deel van die normale verloop. Madiba het altyd ’n doel gehad waarvoor hy geld wou insamel. As dit nie ’n jong vigsleier was nie, was dit ’n jongeling wat uitgeblink het op skool maar nie ’n beurs kon kry nie. Of hy sou fondse help insamel om verligting te bring in ’n gebied wat deur swaar vloede getref is. Madiba het ook daarop aangedring om kontak met gewone mense te behou en daarom het hy middagete gaan eet by die huis van ’n familielid wat ’n groot droogskoonmaak-onderneming in Johannesburg besit. Hy het sy droogskoonmaakwerk baie jare lank aan hulle toevertrou, en al het hy altyd daarop aangedring om te betaal, het hy dit as sy plig beskou om saam met die familie te eet wat met soveel sorg na sy klere omgesien het.

Vir my is dit nog steeds een van Nelson Mandela se grootste deugde: die aandag wat hy aan mense geskenk het wat gewoonlik deur hooggeplaastes geïgnoreer sou word. Hy het die klein mensies erken en respek aan hulle betoon. Niemand is soos ’n dienskneg behandel nie.

Hy wou ook nie van sy oudkollegas en mense van sy eie ouderdomsgroep verwyder word nie. Hy het gevra dat ons middagetes reël met musikante en sterre van sy generasie soos Ken Gampu, Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela, Dorothy Masuka en Dolly Rathebe, en ná die ete sou hy besluit hy wil motors reël vir die vroue wat gesukkel het om ’n bestaan uit hul musiek te maak. Al hierdie vroue het tydens die apartheidsjare hul musiek gebruik om politieke versetboodskappe oor te dra en Madiba het gevoel hy skuld hulle ’n gebaar wat sy waardering sou wys. Hy het verantwoordelik gevoel vir almal om hom: sy familie, sy kollegas, sy personeel en in hierdie geval mense wat hom en die anti-apartheidsbeweging ondersteun het toe hy in die tronk was. In sy dae as gevangene het hy inspirasie uit hul kuns geput en hy was baie dankbaar teenoor hulle. Ons sou al die vernaamste motormaatskappye in Suid-Afrika bel en hulle oorreed om motors aan hierdie helde van die versetbeweging te skenk.

Op ’n dag het daar ’n brief by ons aangekom van ’n seuntjie van omtrent agt jaar oud. Die brief was baie formeel en hy het ’n afspraak aangevra. Die enigste rede waarom Madiba hom wou ontmoet, was omdat hy oor sake wou praat wat Suid-Afrika raak. Ons was geamuseerd deur die formele trant van die brief, en die seuntjie het bygevoeg sy ouers dink nie hy het ’n kans om ’n afspraak met Nelson Mandela gereël te kry nie. Ek het die brief vir Madiba gewys en ons het saam besluit om wel die afspraak toe te staan. Hy het Madiba toe besoek en was net so formeel in sy interaksie as wat hy in sy brief was. ‘Nee, daar is nie ’n spesifieke rede waarom ek ’n afspraak met u aangevra het nie, meneer. Ek wou u eenvoudig net ontmoet,’ het hy gesê. Madiba was beïndruk deur die jong man se eerlikheid oor die saak en dit het aan ons groot plesier verskaf. In sulke oomblikke was hy werklik gelukkig om kontak te hê met gewone mense sonder ’n agenda. Hulle wou hom eenvoudig ontmoet omdat hy hul belangstelling geprikkel het.

Madiba moes ook na sy kleinkinders se behoeftes omsien. Wanneer ons ook al oorsee sou vertrek, sou Mbuso en Andile, die jongste tweetjies van sy oudste seun Ndaba, vir my ’n inkopielys gee van dinge wat hulle wou hê hul oupa vir hulle moes terugbring, soos wat kinders mos maar maak as hul ouers oorsee gaan. Hy het my dan soms die strate ingestuur waar ons ook al was om dinge te gaan soek waarvan ek self nog nooit gehoor het nie. Omdat ek nie self kinders het nie, kon ek nie eens onderskei tussen karakters in animasieflieks nie, wat nog te sê rekenaarspeletjies. Toe Sony die Playstation bekend gestel het, moes ons die Japanse ambassadeur bel om te vra dat ’n Playstation Suid-Afrika toe gestuur word omdat die kinders eenvoudig nie kon wag tot dit hier beskikbaar word nie. Een van die baie min voordele wat Nelson Mandela se kleinkinders geniet het, was dat hulle altyd die eerstes was wat die jongste speletjies en foefies besit het, lank voor al hul vriende.

Tydens ’n besoek aan Kaapstad was Madiba weer herwaarts en derwaarts soos hy probeer het om aan almal se verwagtinge te voldoen, en ná ’n televisie-onderhoud het hy duiselig gevoel en amper flou geword. Aangesien sy gesondheid oor die algemeen goed was, was dit kommerwekkend wanneer hy sleg gevoel het. Hy het nietemin voortgegaan en eers die volgende dag, nadat hy ’n gebied in die Klein-Karoo besoek het waar ’n skool gebou moes word, ingestem om ’n dokter te sien sodra hy terug was in Kaapstad. Hy was hardkoppig en wou nie sy reëlings uitstel en eers ’n dokter spreek nie. Die kardioloog het hom ondersoek en kon nie enige fout vind nie. Dit was eenvoudig uitputting.

Madiba sou daardie aand Londen toe vertrek. Ons het hom gesmeek om te bly, maar hy het daarop aangedring. Hy het gesê daar skort niks met hom nie en hy wou niemand op hol jaag deur die besoek af te stel nie. Ons is toe Londen toe en daarna het ons Marokko aangedoen, waar hy die koning gesien en hom gevra het om geld aan die Nelson Mandela-stigting te skenk. Van daar is ons na Sharjah, ’n emiraat in die Verenigde Arabiese Emirate en die kultuurhoofstad van die VAE. Daar het ons in dieselfde diplomaat vasgeloop wat betrokke was by ons vorige besoek aan Doebai toe Madiba nie daarin kon slaag om die emir sy belofte om geld te skenk te laat nakom nie. Voor ons geland het, het ek seker gemaak die ambassade ontvang ons boodskap dat ons

nie enige diplomatieke steun verlang nie en dat dit nie nodig was vir diplomate om ons te vergesel nie. En tog het ons dieselfde man daar teëgekom.

Madiba was woedend vir hom, maar op een of ander manier het hy dit aan my oorgelaat om die saak te hanteer. Teen dié tyd kon ek sy gesigsuitdrukkings lees. Hy was bot en onvriendelik. Met ons aankoms by die hotel het die diplomaat in Madiba se sitkamer bly sit. Ek het ingestap en vir Madiba gesê dit is tyd dat hy sy dag afsluit. Ek het vir die diplomaat gesê hy kan maar gaan, maar hy het aangekondig dat hy nog ’n rukkie sou bly. Hy het ook gevra vir die program vir die daaropvolgende dae. Ek was geïrriteerd en het voor Madiba vir hom herinner aan die boodskap wat ek vooraf gestuur het. Daarin het ek gesê dat ons verstaan dat hy verantwoordelikhede het, maar ons sal hom laat weet as ons enige hulp benodig. Madiba se oë was groot en jare later sou hy my nog oor dié dag terg en mense waarsku dat ek hulle sou vasvat as hulle nie na my luister nie. Ek was nie regtig so streng nie, maar hy het gehou van die feit dat ek die moed gehad het om iemand op sy plek te sit. Ek dink hy was eintlik net te dankbaar dat ek iets gedoen het eerder as om dit aan hom oor te laat.

In Mei het Madiba ’n uroloog, dokter Gus Gecelter, besoek met mevrou Machel aan sy sy. Hy is die volgende dag na die Parklane-kliniek geneem waar hy toetse moes ondergaan, maar hy het niks gesê nie en ek wou nie inmeng of uitvra oor persoonlike sake nie. Ek het uit vorige ervaring geweet as hy iets met my wou deel, sou hy dit doen.

In Junie 2001 het die hoof van Coca-Cola Suid-Afrika Madiba uitgenooi om die Coca-Cola-groep toe te spreek tydens ’n reis op die Middellandse See. Teen dié tyd het die maatskappy ’n skool in ’n landelike gebied gebou en ook met ander skenkings gehelp vir projekte wanneer Madiba hulle ook al gevra het. Hy het verplig gevoel om hierdie uitnodiging te aanvaar. Ek sou nie kla oor ’n reis op ’n luukse seiljag wat vyf dae sou duur en wat ook sou beteken dat ek kon wegkom van die druk in Johannesburg nie. Tuis was daar eindelose telefoniese versoeke of fakse wat ek moes lees en oorweeg. Ten minste sou ons vyf aande hê waarin ons in een plek slaap, en dit op ’n skip waar niemand ons kon bereik nie.

Toe ek vir Madiba ’n paar name noem van gaste wat op die skip sou wees, het dit die wêrelberoemde bokser Sugar Ray Leonard ingesluit en hy was opgewonde. Hy was ’n bokser in sy jeug en het steeds die sport geniet en gereeld vir Muhammad Ali of Sonny Liston aangehaal. Sy gunsteling van Ali was ‘Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee’. Ek het hom gevra wat dit beteken en hy kon in die fynste besonderhede verduidelik hoe belangrik dit was om vlugvoetig te wees in die bokskryt en dat Ali se houe soos ’n bysteek gebrand het. ‘Pynlik,’ sou hy sê en ’n gesig trek sodat ek kon verstaan dat iemand aan die ontvangkant van Ali se vuiste séérgekry het. Hy het graag oor al hierdie boksers gesels en party van die name het ek nooit eers vantevore gehoor nie.

Die skeepsreis was pure plesier. Die gasvryheid het min gelyke gehad. Die kaptein het vir my gesê: ‘Drink soveel sjampanje as wat jy kan, en as jy wil kan jy daarin bad, want jy sal nooit weer ’n skip met soveel sjampanje aan boord vind nie.’ Ons kon natuurlik nie regtig so baie drink nie, aangesien ons vier-en-twintig uur per dag vir Madiba gereed moes staan. Daar is van hom verwag om twee onthale by te woon terwyl ons op die skip was en by een van hulle moes hy ’n toespraak lewer. Hy moes lojaliteit en toegewydheid aanspoor en hulle gelukwens met die maatskappy se welslae in Afrika, en hulle ook inspireer om welwillendheid aan dié wat voorheen van voordele ontneem is, bo-aan hul agenda te plaas.

Charles, die reisende dokter, en ek het besluit om aan die feestelikhede deel te neem. Wanneer Madiba saans bed toe is, het ons uitgeglip en op die skeepsdek partytjie gehou. Ons kon uiteraard nie te ver gaan nie, en die veiligheidsmense het geweet waar hulle ons kon vind. Om dié rede het ons ’n bietjie vryheid gehad om rond te beweeg. Dit was anders as enige van ons vorige reise. Een oggend was ons die laastes wat op die dansvloer agtergebly het en ons was net betyds terug in ons kajuite om saam met Madiba ontbyt te geniet. Charles was nie verplig om by Madiba te wees tydens ontbyt nie, maar ek was. Ek kon amper nie my oë oophou nie en het die hele dag swaargekry. Die skip het gevaar en ek het Madiba buitetoe geneem sodat hy die skilderagtige kuslyn kon bewonder terwyl hy sit en koerant lees en elke dan en wan opkyk na die eindelose kim. Ek het langs hom gesit en elke nou en dan ingesluimer. Ná vyf dae op die seiljag het Madiba

rusteloos geraak en ons almal het ingehok begin voel. Dit was tyd om na die snelle pas van ons daaglikse bestaan terug te keer.

Op pad terug Suid-Afrika toe sou ons Barcelona aandoen ter ondersteuning van ’n program vir die Nasionale Kinderfonds met die naam ‘Frock & Roll’. Dit was ’n musiekkonsert en modevertoning wat deur Naomi Campbell en Bono gereël is. Die ander lede van U2 was ook daar en terwyl hulle hul treffer ‘One’ gesing het, sou Madiba hom op die verhoog by hulle aansluit. Ek was so trots op die feit dat Nelson Mandela aan ons land behoort. Die skare was amper waansinnig toe Bono op die verhoog stap. Ons kon hul reaksie sien en hoor van waar ons gestaan en wag het tot Madiba moes op stap. Toe Madiba sy verskyning maak, het die skare oorgeloop van blydskap. Dis nie vooraf aangekondig dat hy daar sou wees nie en hy het die publiek verras. Bono het Madiba voorgestel en dit het ’n hele tydjie geneem voor die konsertgangers sou bedaar sodat hy kans kon kry om te praat.

Nadat ons die vliegtuig bestyg het vir ons terugkeer na Suid-Afrika, het Madiba gaan sit en ’n rukkie lank voor hom uitgestaar. Hy het toe na my toe oorgeleun en gesê: ‘Zeldina, hierdie Bono-man, dit lyk vir my hy is nogal gewild.’ Ek het uitgebars van die lag en vir hom gesê Bono is een van die wêreld se grootste musiekhelde met meer ondersteuners as feitlik enigiemand anders. Madiba het geprikkel gelyk deur dié Bonoman en hy was beïndruk dat so ’n jong mens so gewild onder die jeug kon wees. Dit was die eerste keer dat hy Bono se volgelinge gesien het.

8

Working with World Leaders

Although Madiba appeared healthy and strong, he was not. In July 2001 he was diagnosed with prostate cancer. One afternoon after having his lunch at home, he called me to his house and I could hear that there was seriousness in his voice. I had forgotten about the medical tests a few weeks earlier. I rushed over and found him in his usual comfy chair reading papers with his greeting smile as usual. He said: 'Zeldina, sit down.' Which I did. And then he said, 'Now you know we've been for tests the last couple of weeks. I don't want you to be alarmed but we have prostate cancer.' The way he delivered the news made me want to laugh and cry, all at once. By now he knew me so well and knew that I would never say anything disrespecting him, but he also knew my sense of humour. I replied: 'Khulu, oh no. I am so incredibly sorry to hear that but I am sure you are going to have the best treatment possible . . .' He smiled and was appreciative, and then I said, '. . . but I have to tell you we cannot have prostate cancer.' He laughed and then explained the treatment to follow. It was so considerate of him to share his condition with me before he went public with it, and it really showed me that he knew how much I cared for him.

He could never speak in singular terms or in the first person. He could never speak of 'me' or 'I'. It was part of the humble man that he was and everything included everyone around him. It was also part of the collectiveness of the ANC which was imprinted upon him while incarcerated. He was determined that the cancer was merely a little stumbling block that we would overcome in no time. He instructed me to call a press conference where he and Dr Mike Plit, his physician, would explain the situation and treatment to follow. He always

insisted on being extremely open about his health or any medical condition. The next day he started with radiotherapy which continued daily for six weeks. By the second or third week he was losing strength and I was extremely worried about him. I stopped going to the oncology centre with him and Mrs Machel, as it was hard for me to see. She was there every step of the way and they grounded themselves in Johannesburg to slow down the pace and give him time to recover from the treatment. He was OK but stressed from going to the clinic every day.

People prayed and sent good wishes daily. We were inundated with well wishers and that posed its own challenges. The heading of the daily newspaper in Johannesburg, The Star, read on 24 July 2001, MANDELA HAS CANCER. LOW GRADE PROSTATE MALIGNANCY SHOULDN'T SHORTEN LIFE SPAN, and it didn't. I am convinced today that the butterfly effect had a lot to do with his healing. All the prayers and good wishes, the positive thoughts from the public and the complete outpouring of love, in addition to God's grace, of course, is what healed him. Although we didn't travel he insisted that his schedule continue as usual during his six weeks of radiation therapy. He would have appointments in the morning and only go to the clinic early afternoon. After about four weeks we had to simply lighten his work burden as he was becoming tired and worn out, no matter how much he wanted to push forward. He had no particular focus at work and his appointments were really to ensure that he didn't feel isolated while receiving treatment.

Madiba and Mrs Machel needed a holiday after the treatment was completed. The question was, where do we take him? It felt like there was nowhere in South Africa, and in fact nowhere in the world (barring North Korea), where they could have peace and quiet. But we did find a solution. Madiba and Mrs Machel were invited by Elitalia, Italy's communication network, to visit Rome and Venice for a holiday the previous year and we decided to accept the offer. They didn't have any expectations from Madiba and Mrs Machel but purely offered time to come and enjoy Italy. It worked out perfectly. Madiba got to see the Coliseum as they managed to close the entire site for a private tour for him. I was grateful for that because by then I realized that he was merely a prisoner in another life again. He couldn't do the ordinary things we take for granted because he attracted too much attention in public. It was logistically impossible for him to move around without crowds following and people wanting to get close to him, take a

picture, touch him, talk to him. While he didn't mind attracting crowds it sometimes became too much.

He was not doing the ordinary things of life and the ordinary pleasures were limited for him. He spent so many years almost chained down by the determination of his own cause and working towards a better life for others, I wondered at what point he himself would stop and do something for himself. His was indeed a life of service. He did whatever he could always to the benefit of others. He was, however, happy when Mrs Machel was with him and that, at times, was enough for him. With her in our company we did many things that Madiba would never agree to if we were by ourselves. She managed to convince him to try the local cuisine and do touristy, normal things, such as take a tour through Venice on a boat. It was precious to see him trying his very best to be like a tourist. Our hosts were gracious and very respectful of Madiba's privacy.

Soon afterwards we visited Los Angeles, where Madiba had hoped to raise some funds for the Foundation. Hollywood, it turned out, either wasn't that generous at the time or not prepared for our visit. The only support we did get was from the people who were known to have supported the anti-apartheid struggle. Again I didn't leave the hotel in fear that Madiba might need me and I missed really seeing Los Angeles. But our hotel rooms were beautiful. Sadly, some of the people who made huge promises to Madiba never fulfilled them.

* * *

On 11 September 2001 I was attending a course in Cape Town. Proceedings took longer than anticipated and when I arrived back at my parents' house, where I was visiting, my dad told me that two planes had flown into the World Trade Center in New York. I watched the report on CNN and immediately called Madiba, as he was not accustomed to watching news during the day and unless he was in the car he no longer listened to the news on the radio over lunch. He was shocked and I took the opportunity to ask him for a message, as I knew the media was going to start calling for comments. (Whenever anything of any significance happened in the world, the media would call us instantaneously, wanting a comment, advice or an opinion from him about something.) And soon they did, and I relayed his words conveying condolences to the American people. We heard through staff that this angered President Mbeki who felt Madiba was

too quick in releasing a statement. The Presidency felt the right thing would have been for us to wait until the President had issued a statement.

While I understood their concerns, I felt that Madiba never issued statements or spoke on behalf of the country but as a humanitarian. Why couldn't he express his sadness and sympathy? Again I will never know if it was really President Mbeki's concern or that of his staff.

The benefit of our small team was that we could respond to situations immediately. I was not paid extra to deal with the media all hours of the day or night but it became part of my job to be Madiba's spokesperson in addition to being his personal secretary and managing his office. The advantage was that I had two calls to make to react to anything. First to Madiba to ask what he wanted to say, and secondly to Prof. Gerwel to get his opinion on the matter. We were not tied up in bureaucracy because we were such a small team and it worked well.

Even though the media knew I was a rookie they tolerated me and respected me. But Madiba would jokingly tell them sometimes when they still wanted to pose a question after we had ended a press briefing: 'You'd better listen to her, she is my boss.' At one stage I called a Professor of Communication at one of the local universities. I asked for some guidance in dealing with the media and he spent some time with me giving me rules to follow and protocols to apply. The most important were: don't let the media own you or control the territory you are responsible for. Always make sure your territory is clearly defined in which you control them.

I took these lessons to heart. However, to many people I seemed like a bitch: I have been described as a lioness, a witch and a Rottweiler dog. Being the gatekeeper to the most famous man in the world meant I just had to be tough and brusque sometimes. Few realized the challenges I had in trying to deal with the world's media in addition to the other ordinary tasks I had. However, I befriended many people in the media and we built a common trust. I learned from mistakes others made around me and I tried to steer clear of those pitfalls. The effort and stress that goes into counting every word you say has its price. It's exhausting. But the most important advice anyone ever gave me was, never lie to the media. There are literally a million ways to deal with any situation and Madiba was the best teacher in tutoring me to see those ways, but lying was never an option.

We were scheduled to pay a visit to the United States to attend a special session at the United Nations late in September 2001. At first we thought that the meeting would be cancelled as a result of 9/11 but they pressed ahead. Cleaning operations were still under way as we visited Ground Zero. It was very touching and very moving. It was just a few weeks after the actual incident and there was a haze above the area. It was as if I could feel the souls of those thousands of people still drifting in the air. The workers all stopped when they saw Madiba and started applauding him. Only once we stood at Ground Zero did the enormity of the tragedy sink in. Madiba was visibly shocked and disturbed by what he saw. We conversed with Mayor Giuliani for a while and he explained the clean-up operations.

Following our visit to New York, we tried to get in touch with President Bush but he never returned our call. We realized he was facing huge challenges. I called the Situation Room at the White House and asked to schedule a time for Mr Mandela to speak with the President. One also had to reveal the topic of such a conversation. I explained that we were in the US and Madiba simply wanted to offer his support for the challenges the President was facing. Whether the President simply didn't want to speak to him or whether the person in the Situation Room decided for him, we will never know.

* * *

We were still taking part in the negotiations in Arusha in Tanzania on Burundi. Judge Bomani, the administrative head of the negotiating process, then brought some of the rival parties to South Africa where Madiba met with them in Johannesburg to listen to their sides of the conflict. Many of the rebels had never travelled to South Africa before and they were obviously impressed and excited to be in Johannesburg. It was clear that they were nowhere near a peace deal though. The peace negotiations continued for two years. Over the following two years we would travel to Arusha, a town close to the foot of Kilimanjaro in Tanzania where the peace talks were situated. It was necessary for the parties to meet on neutral grounds. Madiba was extremely tough on all parties in the negotiations. Our visits were kept short as facilities in Arusha were limited. He would sit in meetings for hours and hours, negotiating but also forcefully reprimanding all parties. Sometimes Prof. Gerwel and I became nervous and embarrassed as Madiba would be very hard on some people. He was,

however, never disrespectful and despite his tenacity and determination the various parties simply didn't give ground.

We visited Bujumbura in Burundi only on a few occasions, but while we were there one could hear the gunshots in the distance of ongoing fighting in the mountains. In the book Conversations With Myself, Madiba wrote: 'Leadership falls into 2 categories a) Those who are inconsistent, who[se] actions cannot be predicted, who agree today on a [matter] and repudiate it the following day. b) Those who are consistent, who have a sense of honour, a vision.' It was clear to me that if these leaders were consistent in their pursuit for a peaceful solution in their country, if they consistently showed their commitment to driving the process towards a settlement, he would have had more patience with them as it is a leadership style he could then respect.

Often President Mkapa of Tanzania and Presidents Museveni of Uganda and Moi of Kenya, the neighbouring states, would attend joint meetings with us in Arusha. They all referred to Madiba as 'Mzi' – which I gather means 'great one'. People were friendly and hospitable but it was a process that took way too much of Madiba's energy, and I personally felt he could have made a bigger difference by spending that energy in our own country, assisting the government to fast-track delivery of services to the masses, something which now became critical to the people who voted the ANC into power. But it seemed the Mbeki government didn't want him to help; they saw it as meddling.

After two years of negotiations in Tanzania, Madiba called on former President Clinton, President Chirac of France and others to support the signing of an interim peace agreement by all parties involved in Burundi with President Buyoya as an interim head of state. Personally I didn't think they would sign the deal but Madiba sat night after night, sometimes until three in the morning, talking to the parties involved and convincing them that they couldn't disrespect the President of the United States of America by not signing the deal. He said it would be a very bad reflection on them as leaders and a sign that they were not serious about peace.

Thinking back it was actually funny that he used the title of the President of the United States to convince them in this way. Their reasons for not signing were not reasonable and he had exhausted all other avenues by then, trying to convince them that peace was the only solution. There was a budget for the peace process and each

participant received a daily allowance, food and accommodation while in Arusha negotiating. For many rebels who lived and fought their battles from the bush in Burundi it obviously paid to be involved in such peace talks as they could then collect money to support their battles. They therefore dragged out the talks as long as possible and sometimes stayed for two or three weeks while we only went for three days at most. The people in the negotiations, leaders of rival groups, were all highly educated, many of them educated in Europe, and there was no way that they couldn't comprehend the advantages of a peace deal. But like in all similar circumstances they were not necessarily willing to surrender their personal power base for the sake of their country's future. Madiba would remind them continuously that that alone was a sign of a lack of leadership qualities, and even though it sometimes felt as if he rarely stopped short of insulting them, no progress was made.

President Buyoya was an impressive charming intelligent gentleman, apart from the white socks that he wore. On 18 April 2001 some rebels invaded a radio station in Bujumbura and news spread across the globe that it was the start of a coup. Madiba was somewhere and couldn't be reached for several hours. I couldn't get hold of Prof. Gerwel and Judge Bomani's phone was switched off too. Media started calling our office and wanted confirmation about the coup. At first I was sarcastic about it and asked the first caller whether he/she thought I would know about a coup sitting in my office in Johannesburg. I then decided to call President Buyoya as he was the only one I had a number for and who would be able to confirm such a rumour or not. I spoke to him and he was as friendly as always and happy to hear from 'Mzi's' office. 'Oh Miss Zelda, I am happy to hear from you, how is Mzi?' he asked. He explained that it was simply some rebels who'd taken over a radio station and I told him what the international news bulletins were reporting. I urged him to issue a statement to dispel the rumours and from our side we were able to confirm that there was no coup. I clearly remember that I had had plans for that evening to socialize but spent the entire evening fielding media calls. As soon as Madiba became available I briefed him. He laughed at all the unnecessary commotion of which he was completely unaware.

* * *

Dr Percy Yutar requested to see Madiba one day. Percy Yutar was the state's lawyer in the trial that sent Madiba to life-long imprisonment. He was in financial difficulty and wanted Madiba to assist him to sell the Rivonia Trial documents. They had seen each other once since that time, while Madiba was President, when he invited Dr Yutar to lunch at the official Presidential residence in Pretoria. He explained that he had tried to convince the government to buy the documents from him, but we refused to help too. I couldn't quite comprehend how he ended up having these documents in his possession but thought he probably owned them because it was the case in which he appeared. Luckily the documents were later bought, by the Oppenheimers and Douw Steyn, and most of them are now in the National Archives.

When Madiba asked to see Yutar for the first time after his release, in the 1990s, I felt sorry for Yutar, knowing that he had to live with himself after all of that but now it somehow disgusted me that this man sent Madiba to life imprisonment, had a wonderful free life himself, and then he still wanted Madiba to help him to sell the exact documents that sent him to prison. Those documents belonged to the government; how did he manage to take them to his personal archive after he retired? It just didn't sit well with me and I decided even before Madiba declined to help with the sale of the documents that I would not be party to that deal on principle.

On 2 November 2001 Douw opened the house on his game reserve in the Limpopo Province called Shambala that he had built for Madiba as a retreat. Shambala is the Tibetan word for 'heaven on earth'. Douw Steyn's generosity didn't stop the time he housed Madiba for six months after he left Soweto in the early 1990s after he'd separated from Mrs Winnie Mandela. On one occasion Douw invited Madiba and Mrs Machel to his farm Shambala in the Waterberg. It was a relaxed luncheon that was planned with just Douw, his wife Carolyn and his staff on the farm. When Madiba and Mrs Machel returned they told me that Douw had offered to build a house on the farm for Madiba and Mrs Machel's use, where they could relax and go to as no one would be able to disturb them there because of the privacy of the farm. Madiba and Mum (as we started calling Mrs Machel, imitating Madiba) knew not to refuse the offer as Douw didn't take lightly to being refused. In no time he built the most beautiful house on the farm, before even completing his own.

In many ways Douw Steyn reminded me of Jay Gatsby. He would always host short-notice, over-the-top lavish parties at one of his

residences. Madiba only attended a few of these but he always valued spending time with Douw and was most entertained by the lavish lifestyles of the rich and famous. Douw would tell Madiba about his extravagant deals and it would intrigue Madiba that one person could have so much wealth. After his release Madiba was introduced to Douw by members of the ANC. When Madiba left Soweto in the mid-90s, separating from his wife Mrs Winnie Madikizela Mandela, Douw housed Madiba for six months and it is there that Madiba completed his memoirs, Long Walk to Freedom, and regularly met with ANC officials to work on an interim constitution for South Africa. That residence belonging to Douw was later converted to the Saxon hotel.

Finally there was a space where we could hide. Even though Madiba loved people and being with people it was difficult in the city to find time for peace and quiet, time to think. He was confronted by requests in the city from many people he eagerly wanted to please, but if there was a place where people would have difficulty to find him, we could create the space where he could think and perhaps write. Shambala is a good distance from Johannesburg and we all agreed that few people would actually go through the trouble of travelling there to visit Madiba. He would visit this house on a few occasions and instructed us to clear his diary for a few weeks at a time to spend time there.

The launch of the house at Shambala coincided with a visit of the Miss World contestants to South Africa and Douw hosted them on the farm at the same time. Madiba had made a point before to always meet the Miss South Africa winner after she was crowned every year. Then one year he indicated that he wanted to meet a Miss World who was visiting South Africa but at that stage he had not yet met the reigning Miss South Africa. I warned him he couldn’t meet Miss World and not Miss South Africa because we’d be in trouble for not paying attention to our own people first, and he agreed to meet the Miss South Africa first. Then he repeated the story of how well I advised him. I would have rather preferred to be known as someone who advised him about preventing a major world war, but he was very impressed about my good advice about Miss World vs Miss South Africa. Friends and associates of Madiba complained that he spent too much time with beauty queens and that it negatively impacted on his image. Just one of the struggles we had to face. He admired beauty and these seemingly frivolous interactions were purely because he

enjoyed being in the company of these beautiful women, who of course all adored Nelson Mandela.

* * *

Early in November 2001 we visited Brussels where we spoke to Prime Minister Verhofstadt about the settlement being reached in Burundi and how the European Union could support the country – on 1 November we had travelled to Bujumbura for the swearing in ceremony of the new interim government. I felt that the peace deal was somewhat forced but if Madiba hadn't insisted on it they would still be negotiating. He was relieved that it was over. A South African peace-keeping force is present in Burundi to this day.

In December we proceeded to Tripoli to visit the Brother Leader, after which we set off to the US to attend a fundraiser for the Mosaic Foundation, a foundation run by the wife of Prince Bandar. We also visited Maryland as well as delivering a report to the United Nations on Burundi. We then proceeded to Toronto and Ottawa where Madiba was bestowed with Canada's highest honour by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. We were tired after a very long year and Madiba's age was not on our side. Yet his urgency to make a difference didn't diminish. He wanted to continue to spread the good news of a new South Africa to the world. He wanted to encourage foreigners to maintain confidence in our country and to invest. And in between, he wanted to maintain relationships with his friends.

Before travelling to Tripoli we had again visited Saudi, Oman, Bahrain and Kuwait to fundraise for the Foundation. I liked Oman and Bahrain and the King of Bahrain was very hospitable, as was the Emir of Oman. In Kuwait something strange happened. We've all taken bath soaps or toiletries in our own bathrooms when travelling to luxury hotels. In this particular guest house Madiba's bathroom was stocked with a very expensive brand of soaps, aftershave, bodywash, etc. While we were at an appointment away from the guest house, someone, presumably a bodyguard as they were the only ones who remained behind, decided to help himself to some of these toiletries in Madiba's bathroom. Little did he know that Madiba had taken note of every item in his bathroom before we left. Upon our return he noticed that something was missing and he called all the security detail to stand parade. He also called me and told me to come in as 'witness'. The lawyer in Madiba was holding court. I wanted to hide my face in

embarrassment on behalf of the bodyguards.

He questioned them and gave 'the villain' the opportunity to replace the item or else he would report him to the Minister of Police when we returned home, or else he would have all of them fired if the 'villain' didn't come forward. He wanted me to call the Minister there and then from Kuwait to report the case, but I thought it was better that we left it until our return to South Africa (and pretended that I couldn't get hold of the Minister immediately). Madiba was very serious. The next morning the item was replaced and he forgot about it, as he promised he would. He didn't mind you taking the toiletries from your own bathroom, but not from his. And when we left, he didn't want to take any of the items in his bathroom with him; he left it all untouched and unopened. He never wanted to take advantage of our hosts and he expected everyone to behave that way.

On another occasion elsewhere someone nabbed cutlery from our host and when he was caught by his senior I knew I had to deal with the matter with the utmost discretion, as Madiba would not tolerate such things. I decided that we had to deal with it internally rather than call on the 'lawyer' to become the 'prosecutor'. Because teams rotated, people never knew what happened to others while we were on trips abroad and therefore this particular team had no experience with the 'prosecutor'. I insisted in this case that the guy be disciplined within his force structures upon our return home even though we returned the cutlery to its owner before we left. The one thing Madiba was totally intolerant about was dishonesty. Whether it involved a bar of soap or a political agenda.

To me, Madiba was a kind, generous soul but principled and disciplined in every sense of the word. I don't know whether it is as a result of my Calvinist upbringing or my sensitive personality and having grown up in a house where the only violence experienced was that of my father's loud voice, but I get scared whenever someone raises his/her voice. I avoid confrontation of a personal nature and rather become quiet and withdraw myself completely. It is not that I fear confrontation as such, but I get nervous whenever other people raise their voices. It was the same when Madiba raised his voice. He had a loud voice by nature but increasing the pitch just a little made me nervous. It wasn't as if he had raging outbursts and I only heard him raising his voice on a few occasions during the years I worked with him. It was usually only in situations that really angered him, like when someone betrayed him or was dishonest or over a personal

matter. I would cringe for the other person's sake and then as soon as the person left, I would try and defuse the tension. Those close to Madiba knew when he got angry. But he would never take out his anger on others then. He would become quiet too and disturbed.

During the latter part of his Presidency, when I often found myself 'manning' the office in Pretoria by myself, I would often call his bodyguard Rory Steyn, whenever he was on duty, to give me an assessment of the President's overall mood before he arrived at the office. The bodyguards would drive the President from his home in Houghton to the office in Pretoria and Rory would be one of the people who would know whether the President was serious, in a humorous mood, or if his mind was elsewhere occupied. Rory's assessments helped me to ease into the day with the President without making inappropriate comments or an overly friendly greeting when he didn't feel up to it.

* * *

By these accounts of all our travels it sounds as if the Nelson Mandela Foundation raised millions but in fact we didn't. It was clearly easier for Madiba to fundraise for the ANC, a liberation movement, than for a foundation. The Foundation was not well established, or rather, its direction was constantly changing, and I think people hesitated to donate, not knowing whether it was merely a family foundation or a NGO implementing projects.

In early 2002 I ran into someone from the Protocol section at the President's office. I was told by this particular person that paintings and photos in which Madiba appeared had been removed from the display area at the Spier wine estate in the Western Cape, in preparation of a visit there by President Mbeki. I had no reason not to believe this person and it was confirmed when it appeared in the local Mail and Guardian newspaper a week later. It put validity to my point that it was not necessarily President Mbeki who fostered the particular feelings towards Madiba but that it was aggravated by actions like these from staff. Surely it must have been an embarrassment to President Mbeki to read something like this in the newspapers. It is so petty and there is no way that I could believe that the President would instruct his staff to remove any items that bear relation to Nelson Mandela.

* * *

In March 2002 Madiba gave me a task. He wanted me to organize a gala dinner for struggle veterans, similar to what he did during his Presidency when he hosted wives of struggle veterans by inviting them for tea at Mahlamba Ndlopfu. Even though they no longer shared the focus of a liberation struggle he felt it was necessary for them to be honoured and that he was not seen to have forgotten them even though his life had moved on beyond the struggle. Only this time, it had to be around 1,500 guests. We quickly fundraised and set up a task team for the event.

The memories of this event and the difficulties we faced in organizing it will remain with me for the rest of my life. It was worth every effort though when one witnessed how old people's faces lit up when they saw friends and colleagues they hadn't seen in many years, often not knowing if people they were close to in the struggle were still alive. Most of them still lived in poor circumstances without basic services despite their history in the liberation struggle. I somehow also felt angry for them and did what I could to ensure that at least once they were paid tribute to in a festive way.

It was impossible to make everyone happy. Simply, Madiba was never keen on staying anywhere too long. He wanted to keep moving and I think an urgency drove him to do as much as possible before he got too old to move around. He was attending at least five to seven public events per week at the time and every event was the same story. There was no reason for him to sit at an event for two hours to listen to endless speeches. I recall him once bringing a priest's prayer to a rude halt when he asked the Master of Ceremonies to go and stop the priest from continuing to pray. When I asked him about it afterwards he said that he didn't have a problem with praying but that it was not necessary for the priest to try and convert us all with one such long prayer. He was right. The prayer was not limited to blessing or opening the ceremony but was longer than a sermon!

There was a fine line between appearing to be disrespectful and allowing the programme to reach its functionality. In February 2003 Mathatha Tsedu wrote an editorial in the Sunday Times criticizing us for not allowing Madiba to remain longer at an opening of a school. Mathatha wrote: 'It was very embarrassing, and many people here say because Mandela's life is run by some white woman, when he attends black events he is always in a hurry. "We understand that when he attends white events he stays longer," an organiser told me.' He

continued:

> I know Zelda la Grange, Mandela's personal assistant, and believe she would not snub occasions simply because they were black. The question must be asked whether Mandela's office is managing his diary correctly to ensure that he not only attends fleetingly to issues and events but stays long enough not to be seen to be just passing through.

Easier said than done. Madiba was the one who would look at a draft programme before we attended events and tell me where to insist they cut the programme, and then it was up to me to make sure I got him out of an event, usually about thirty minutes after arrival. Yes it was 'fleetingly passing through', but he wanted to fleetingly pass through irrespective of race, the nature of the event, or where it was.

The reality was that the fact that I was white was never going to be overlooked by many people. Race was still an issue and many people have not come to terms with the fact that that we are all South Africans, irrespective of colour. The damage done by apartheid was underestimated and it manifested in ways that whenever no other excuse could be found for a problem, race was the easiest issue to blame. I had learned from Madiba that two things would destroy the validity of your argument immediately if you used them: race and insults. When your argument is based on principle there is no reason for you to grapple with issues of race or try and insult your opponent. Stick to the principle, and if you can't it means you don't have an argument.

(In 2008 I was awarded one of the ten Women of the Year awards by City Press and Rapport, two Sunday newspapers in South Africa. Mathatha was the Editor-in-Chief of City Press then and I appreciated the gesture regardless of our earlier differences. I'm sure he did not argue for this award personally but it must have passed by his desk and he could have objected to it if he'd wanted.)

There were two things Madiba was completely intolerant of as far as events were concerned: a briefing and a waiting room. He argued if we could be on time, everyone could, and he refused on many occasions to go to waiting or holding rooms. He would enter the events and by his presence force proceedings to start whether people were ready or not.

* * *

In April 2002 South Africa had its first space traveller, Mark Shuttleworth. Mark was well known in the country for his invention of an internet banking security software program which he sold for billions abroad. He was South Africa's youngest billionaire and, of course, he got tasked to build a school too. Mark visited us on a few occasions and it was agreed that he would call Madiba on my cellphone once he was in space. It was very exciting. We all watched him flying off into space but on the next day we went on with life, and while his trip dominated the news we had to continue with business as usual.

The agreement was that Mark would call on a particular day and I of course forgot to make a note of it. My cellphone rang and the number was disguised as 'private number'. Usually I don't answer those but I did as Madiba was next door in the office and he heard the phone ringing. On the other end of the line the person said: 'Hello, is that Zelda?' It sounded like a call from America and I was irritated as I hated people disturbing me during the day on my cellphone to tell me about their long proposals or to have lengthy discussions while I was attending to Madiba. I said: 'Yes, can I help you?' The person said: 'I'm calling from the ISS.' I thought: What is the ISS? Again, now slightly irritated, I asked the man how I could help him. He repeated, 'It's Mark from the ISS.' I thought it could be some organization and tried to think quickly so as to not sound stupid. His last attempt was: 'Zelda, it's Mark, I'm calling from space.' Oh my word. The penny dropped and I said: 'Oh Mark, how are you . . . ? Just hold on for Madiba.'

I rushed into Madiba's office and he too didn't know at first what I was trying to tell him when I said 'It's Mark, Mark Shuttleworth, he's calling from space.' It was funny at the time though and later when Mark returned he came to visit to tell us about his experiences and he enjoyed our story. We were very proud of him.

It was about this time that Madiba announced on one of his visits to Qunu that he wanted trees to be planted on his farm, big full-grown trees to protect the view of his house from the road, the N2 highway that ran past his farm. He tasked me with this and I didn't have a clue where to start searching for someone who could do this. I called my dad and asked him whether he knew who one contacts for something like this and he said that he would make a few calls and get back to me. Comprehending my sense of urgency about everything in life he soon called back and said he would try and help me to find someone. Then a day later he called to say that he managed to get a quote from

someone to do the job and he would forward it to us. It was way too expensive and I reported back to him. He said he would try to find a solution. Being a daddy's girl I always expected my dad to find solutions for all my problems. And so he did. He called back to offer to go and do it himself.

I was hesitant and sceptical about this. I asked him to put his proposal in writing and I gave it to Madiba. Madiba was receptive of the idea and asked to speak to my dad. By this time they had already met and Madiba liked my father's unpretentious attitude, and because of Madiba's influence in my life my dad's attitude had changed towards him. I then made it very clear to Madiba that I did not wish to be involved in these dealings at all and that my dad had to report to his lawyer, Ismail Ayob, who was responsible for all payments. Madiba understood my concern that I didn't want to be blamed by anyone for nepotism.

Exactly as I expected my dad put his heart and soul into the project and soon the trees were planted. To the end Madiba always asked after my parents and specifically about my father's well-being. My father didn't charge Madiba for the work he had done, but only for procurement of the trees, groundwork and the labour he had to bring in from elsewhere. Madiba was extremely appreciative. We teased my dad and said: 'You see, times have changed . . . here you are, the old conservative, planting trees in a black man's garden!' and we would all laugh about it. My dad was extremely proud of his job and always asked me to report about the trees whenever I visited Qunu. My parents were so appreciative of the opportunities Madiba had granted me that it changed them and softened their hearts too. Those interactions, Madiba's genuine appreciation and the respect with which he dealt with my father, changed my father for ever.

* * *

We returned to New York in February of 2002 to attend the launch of the Tribeca Film Festival established by Jane Rosenthal and Robert De Niro. Following the attack on the Twin Towers in Lower Manhattan, Wall Street was desperate to rebuild its reputation as a safe environment in the city. We were also invited to a cocktail function in City Hall hosted by the new Mayor, Michael Bloomberg. We loathed going to cocktail parties or stand-up informal events with Madiba. People would just overwhelm him completely and, in addition, it was

useless talking to him in such circumstances. His hearing aids would cut out all sound completely once too many people talked around him or the surroundings were too noisy.

We entered the room where about 200 people were gathered. There was no one to meet us and we started making our way through the crowd until we came across some children in the room. Madiba immediately started conversing with them as all chidren attracted him like a magnet. He had to bend down to hear them properly and I was trying my best to repeat what they were saying so that he could respond to them appropriately. While bending down a man approached him from the back and pulled on his shirt to try and draw his attention. I thought: What on earth . . . ? He continued and I turned to him and said, 'Excuse me Sir, but what are you doing pulling on Mr Mandela's shirt? He is busy with the children.' He looked around as if to try and get help from someone and then said to me, 'I want Mr Mandela to greet these people, they are my friends.' My blood rose and I said: 'Well, can you give him a chance to finish with the children please?' He then said, kind of tongue in cheek, 'Do you know me?' and I abruptly responded: 'No I don't, but please just stop doing that.' A third person appeared and whispered in my ear, 'It's Mayor Bloomberg, he is the host of the function.' You could bowl me over with surprise. I apologized but nevertheless told him to please not pull on Mr Mandela's shirt as he was already unstable on his feet, and that he would turn around once he had finished with the kids. The Mayor didn't like me but I had no choice.

As we moved through the room a little later I saw another familiar face, that of British actor Hugh Grant. Everyone in the room wanted their picture taken with Madiba and soon chaos ensured. Hugh Grant didn't ask to meet Mr Mandela but he smiled and from the look on his face I could gather that he was obviously excited to see him. Hugh moved in right next to Madiba and while still holding his own camera turned it around to take a picture while he was standing next to Madiba. A selfie as we have now named it. I then said, 'Excuse me Mr Grant, I am Mr Mandela's assistant. Can I please help you take a photo?' I had become the ex officio official photographer as I always had to take the pictures people wanted and became an expert on how people's cameras work. I didn't mind if the time and place was right for it. He was grateful. I didn't explain to Madiba who exactly he was.

* * *

On 16 February 2003 Mathatha Tsedu wrote another editorial, this time attacking the Treatment Action Campaign for using Madiba's face on a t-shirt. The TAC was in the forefront of pushing government to give the poor access to anti-retroviral AIDS drugs, something that Madiba was supporting and prepared to fight for publicly. At that point South Africa was fast becoming the country with the highest incidence of AIDS in the world. The government did not give people free access to AIDS drugs. Madiba tried to meet with the now late Minister of Health, Dr Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, on several occasions to discuss this issue and he was upset and disgusted that she had paid so little attention to the matter. South Africa was becoming the laughing stock of the world because of its AIDS policy and behind the scenes Madiba was trying to fight the battle on behalf of faceless and nameless people. He didn't mind the TAC using his face and again Mathatha attacked Madiba's office for not conducting itself in the right way by protecting Madiba's image from 'abuse like this', as he put it. I was starting to feel rebellious about many issues, this being one of them. Abuse to me consisted in the fact that people without a voice and platform didn't have access to drugs and were dying by the millions. By not providing treatment the government was denying people their human rights.

We were extremely frustrated by the lack of response from the government on Madiba's calls to meet with them and to discuss the issue of HIV drugs. On one occasion, Minister Msimang only met Madiba for thirty minutes and then she told him that she had to leave as she had an appointment for a dress fitting.

The denialism reached right to the top. President Mbeki said that he had never seen a person with AIDS, yet Madiba helped countless people to get access to AIDS drugs – people who then recovered and led some quality lives. The President also denied that there was a relation between HIV and AIDS. We helped a young lady who was on her last legs when she came to see Madiba to ask for help. She couldn't eat by herself. He had her admitted to hospital and when the drugs she took created side effects another cocktail was prescribed. She was later discharged and today she is happily married with children and leads a normal life. Because of both local public and international pressure, and also pressure from people like President Clinton, government now provides anti-retroviral drugs and South Africa's AIDS incidence rates are lower than before.

On the evening of 5 May 2003 I received a call from someone who

told me that Madiba's best friend, Walter Sisulu, had just passed away. They were imprisoned together but had been friends since they were young. I immediately called Kgalema Motlanthe, whom I respected and liked, to ask him to confirm it. Kgalema was the Secretary General of the ANC at the time. He didn't know about it either but another source soon confirmed it. It was already late at night and Madiba was asleep but I knew he would want to know immediately if anything happened to Uncle Walter. Mrs Machel was in her home village in Mozambique and couldn't be reached and so I drove to Madiba's house. I entered and told the household staff why I was there. I knew that this was not the kind of thing that one did over the telephone as this would be a great shock to him. I went up to his bedroom and for the first time I was scared to wake him up. I often woke him when we travelled but this was different.

I first touched the duvet around his feet and said, 'Khulu, Khulu, I need to speak to you, please wake up.' The second time around I touched the duvet close to his shoulder and he woke up. All he said was 'Yes Zeldina?' as if he expected me to ask him something. I said: 'I'm very sorry to be the one to have to tell you this but Uncle Walter passed away.' He either didn't hear me at first or he was in shock. I repeated myself. With one hand he reached for his hairline on his forehead and exclaimed: 'Good God.' It took him some time to sit up straight. I decided to sit at the foot of his bed for a while to make sure he was OK and repeated that I was very sorry to be the carrier of such bad news and told him what I had heard. I also told him that I thought he would want to know and he responded: 'Yes, yes of course.'

We agreed that he would go to the Sisulu residence very early the next morning and he asked me to wake him in the early hours. It was hard for Madiba too to see the sadness of Aunt Albertina, Uncle Walter's wife. He had known these people his entire life and they were part of him. He had so much respect for Uncle Walter and always commented on his admiration for Uncle Walter's humility and simplicity, and also for his outstanding leadership and always being willing to lead from behind and to push others forward. Silently I thought that was exactly it. Uncle Walter must have pushed Madiba to the front those years they were imprisoned. Madiba often told stories about their interaction and how often they discussed things. It was indeed a sad day for everyone. South Africa lost one of its biggest heroes.

*   *   *

It was becoming time for Madiba to slow down. He simply could not keep up his schedule and continue to respond to every request that was put to him by friends, colleagues and associates. He would divide his time between Johannesburg, Qunu and Maputo and then spend some quiet time at Shambala whenever he wanted to write. The house at Shambala also presented the opportunity for him to entertain high profile visitors who couldn't go to a normal game farm, as Shambala was completely private.

A few prominent artists suggested that Madiba's prison number be used to start an AIDS campaign. It would be called 46664. Madiba had always felt strongly against his face, image or name being commercialized, whether it was for charity or commercial purposes. The artists therefore came up with this idea of using his prison number to help raise funds for the AIDS campaign. They proposed launching the brand at a big concert to be held in Cape Town, all of them of course offering to perform free of charge. While some of the singers were rehearsing in Cape Town the CEO of the Foundation decided that Madiba should speak to the artists to thank them for their tireless dedication in their efforts to support a cause close to his heart.

We were at Shambala at the time. A telephone call was scheduled when the singers would all be together so that Madiba could speak to them. I typed out their names, for instance 'Brian May – Queen' and 'Dave Stewart – Eurythmics', after briefing Madiba. I tried to explain to him who everyone was and gave him the piece of paper in order for him to remember the names. Brian May was first on the line. I stood beside him to point to the piece of paper who he was talking to. When Brian answered he said, 'Hallo Madiba, how are you?' Madiba politely said, 'Hi Brian, I'm well thank you and how are you?' Brian responded to say he was well and that they were excited to be part of this event. Madiba acknowledged and then asked: 'How is the Queen?' He then spoke to Dave Stewart and asked him 'How is the Eurythmics?' He had no idea that these were bands. He'd lost track of technology during his imprisonment and it was hard to explain to him even what a CD was, let alone musicians and bands that were familiar to us – I'd overloaded him with the wrong information. It was precious to watch such innocence but the intention behind it was pure.

Earlier that year Madiba turned eighty-five. I was tasked by the CEO of the Foundation to organize a celebration for Madiba's

birthday. I fundraised for the event and over 1,200 guests were invited to the black-tie event. Associates of Madiba from all over the world were invited – supporters, friends, politicians, royalty, etc. I guessed that I would be in the middle of the firing line when people started taking the guest list apart. I invited from gardeners to royalty to ensure that the group was fully representative. I worked day and night and my task was simple: we needed to ensure that Madiba was celebrated during his lifetime. When we walked to the elevator on the night of the event for Madiba to depart, close to midnight, Mrs Machel said: 'Well done Zeldina, Madiba was really honoured tonight.' Those words stuck by me despite all the flak I had to endure. People were complaining that Madiba was being 'poppified' – being made a pop star – because many celebrities attended the event, but no one paid attention to the gardeners, drivers and security who attended the event as guests, clearly because they were not considered famous or important enough to receive attention from the media. In addition, when we wanted help from the international community the celebrities were always called upon to give time and effort for free.

Madiba liked parties. He had gone over the guest list several times and approved of every person that was there. Some family members were angry as they were not seated around the main table, yet there were royalty and heads of state present. I subsequently wasn't invited to Madiba's ninetieth birthday at his farm in Qunu, and when Mrs Machel insisted that I be there, I was deliberately seated at a children's table right at the back of the tent. Not that I had hoped to be at the main table but it was a clear sign of some of the family's value of me in their father's life, and an indication of what was to be expected. I never discussed my problems with Madiba because I felt he had enough to worry about. That day, perhaps, I should have spoken to him.

* * *

On 7 November Madiba travelled to Shambala where we organized for him to spend the weekend with ex-Robben Islanders and ex-colleagues. A smaller group this time and people who were close to him during the struggle years. It remains one of my best memories, to see them all interacting, enjoying and reminiscing about old times. They all enjoyed visiting Shambala and we made sure they were well treated and spoilt. I loved listening to their stories and teasing one

another. These were the men that drove the struggle, planned sabotage and actions to try and bring the apartheid government to its senses. They'd spent a lifetime in prison and now they were all elderly men, enjoying their senior years, free at last. It was a proper reunion and everyone tried to outdo each other's stories. One of those exceptionally precious occasions.

We had come such a long way in South Africa. Here I was enjoying time with ex-Robben Islanders, while at the time I was growing up I'd considered it a good thing that they were imprisoned. I became fond of many of them, such as Ahmed Kathrada, Eddie Daniels, Mac Maharaj and Andrew Mlangeni. These were the people we had to thank as they'd kept Madiba's spirit alive in prison. And I often wondered if they ever lost hope during their time in prison or whether they ever had imagined that they would be there that day, on a private game farm, enjoying reminiscing with Madiba.

8

Werk saam met wêreldleiers

Hoewel Madiba gesond en sterk gelyk het, was hy nie. In Julie 2001 is prostaatkanker by hom gediagnoseer. Een middag ná ete by sy huis het hy my gebel en daarheen ontbied en ek kon die erns in sy stem hoor. Ek het vergeet van die mediese toetse wat hy 'n paar weke tevore moes ondergaan. Ek het so gou as moontlik by sy huis opgedaag en hom daar in sy gewone gemakstoel gevind waar hy koerant sit en lees. Hy het my oudergewoonte met 'n glimlag gegroet en gesê: 'Zeldina, sit.' Wat ek toe ook gedoen het. En toe sê hy: 'Jy weet mos ek het die afgelope paar weke vir toetse gegaan. Ek wil jou nie laat skrik nie, maar ons het prostaatkanker.'

Die manier waarop hy my die nuus meegedeel het, het my tegelykertyd laat lag en huil. Teen dié tyd het hy my goed geken en geweet ek sou niks oneerbiedigs sê nie, maar hy het ook my humorsin geken. Ek het gesê: 'Khulu, nee, ek is bitter jammer om dit te verneem,

maar ek is seker u gaan die beste behandeling moontlik ontvang.' Hy het waarderend geglimlag, en toe sê ek: 'Maar ek moet nou vir u sê, *ons* kan nie prostaatkanker hê nie.'

Hy het gelag en toe verduidelik wat die behandeling sou behels. Dit was so bedagsaam van hom om die nuus met my te deel voordat hy dit openbaar maak en dit het vir my gewys hoeveel hy vir my omgee.

Dit was vir hom moeilik om die woorde 'my' en 'ek' te gebruik. Hy was 'n nederige mens en het alles en almal om hom ingesluit. Dit was ook deel van die samehorigheidsgevoel van die ANC wat by hom ingeprent is terwyl hy in die tronk was. Hy was vasbeslote dat die kanker net 'n stuikelblok was wat 'ons' in 'n japtrap sou oorwin. Hy het my aangesê om 'n nuuskonferensie te reël waar hy en dokter Plit, sy dokter, sy situasie en die behandeling sou verduidelik. Hy het altyd daarop aangedring om oop kaarte te speel oor sy gesondheid en mediese toestand. Hy het die volgende dag met bestralingsterapie begin en die behandeling het ses weke geduur. Teen die derde week het hy krag begin verloor en ek het baie bekommerd oor hom geraak. Ek het nie meer saam met hom en mevrou Machel na die onkologiesentrum gegaan nie, want dit was vir my te moeilik om hom so te sien. Sy was elke treetjie van die pad saam met hom en hulle was in Johannesburg gevestig sodat die pas kon afneem en hy tyd kon hê om van die behandeling te herstel. Dit het redelik goed met hom gegaan, maar die daaglikse besoeke aan die kliniek het sy energie gedreineer.

Mense het elke dag gebid en goeie wense aangestuur. Ons is oorval deur ondersteuners wat hom 'n spoedige herstel toegewens het, en dit het nóg uitdagings gebied. Die hoofopskrif in een van die Johannesburgse dagblaaie, *The Star*, het op 24 Julie 2001 gelui: *Mandela has cancer. Low grade prostate malignancy shouldn't shorten lifespan,* en dit het nie. Ek is vandag vas oortuig dat die skoenlappereffek baie met sy herstel te doen gehad het. Al die gebeure en goeie wense, die positiewe gedagtes van die publiek en die liefde wat hy uit alle oorde ontvang het, saam met die genade van die Here, is wat hom gesond gemaak het. Al het ons nie gereis nie, het hy tog daarop aangedring om met sy gewone program voort te gaan tydens die ses weke van die bestralingsterapie. Hy sou soggens afsprake nakom en die kliniek vroegmiddag besoek. Na omtrent vier weke

moes ons sy werklas verminder omdat hy moeg en afgerem begin raak het, al wou hy ook hóé graag vorentoe beur. Hy het nie werklik enige fokus gehad nie en sy afsprake was eintlik daar om te keer dat hy geïsoleerd voel terwyl hy behandeling ontvang.

Madiba en mevrou Machel het ’n vakansie nodig gehad na die behandeling. Die vraag was waarheen sou ons hom neem? Dit het gevoel asof daar geen plek in Suid-Afrika, of eintlik in die hele wêreld behalwe Noord-Korea, was waar hy vrede en stilte kon verwag nie. Maar ons het ’n oplossing gevind. Elitalia, Italië se kommunikasienetwerk, het Madiba en mevrou Machel die vorige jaar na Rome en Venesië genooi vir ’n vakansie en ons het besluit om die aanbod te aanvaar. Hulle het niks van Madiba en mevrou Machel verwag nie, maar hulle eenvoudig die geleentheid gebied om Italië te geniet. Dit het goed uitgewerk. Madiba sou ook die Colosseum kon sien en die hele terrein is afgesper vir ’n privaat besoek deur hom. Ek was dankbaar daarvoor en het weer besef dat hy eintlik weer ’n gevangene in ’n ander lewe was. Hy kon nie die gewone dinge doen wat ons as vanselfsprekend aanvaar nie omdat hy te veel aandag getrek het in die openbaar. Dit was logisties onmoontlik vir hom om rond te beweeg sonder dat skares hom volg en mense naby hom wou kom om foto’s te neem, aan hom te raak en met hom te praat. Ek het nie omgegee as hy skares lok nie, maar soms het dit gevaarlik geword.

Hy het nie die gewone dinge van die lewe gedoen nie en alledaagse plesiertjies was vir hom beperk. Hy het baie jare so deurgebring, amper vasgeketting aan sy eie vasbeslotenheid om doelwitte te bereik en te strewe na ’n beter lewe vir ander. Ek het gewonder wanneer hy sou ophou en iets vir homself sou doen. Sy lewe was werklik op diens gerig. Hy het gedoen wat hy kon ten bate van ander. Hy was wel gelukkig wanneer mevrou Machel by hom was en soms was dit genoeg vir hom. Met haar in ons geselskap het ons baie dinge gedoen waartoe Madiba nie andersins sou instem nie. Sy het hom oortuig om plaaslike kossoorte op die proef te stel en die gewone toeriste-dinge te doen, soos ’n toer op ’n boot deur Venesië. Dit was kostelik om te kyk hoe hy probeer om soos ’n toeris op te tree. Ons gashere was wonderlik en het respek vir Madiba se privaatheid gehad.

Kort daarna het ons Los Angeles besoek waar Madiba gehoop het om geld vir die stigting in te samel. Hollywood was egter nie baie

vrygewig nie, of dalk net nie voorbereid op ons besoek nie. Die enigste hulp was van mense wat die stryd teen apartheid ondersteun het. Ons het onder andere vir Barbra Streisand, Whoopi Goldberg, Sylvester Stallone, Muhammad Ali en Dave Matthews ontmoet en middagete aan huis van Denzel Washington geniet. Weer het ek feitlik nooit die hotel verlaat nie uit vrees dat Madiba my mag nodig kry en ek het die kans om Los Angeles regtig te sien misgeloop. Maar ons hotelkamers was pragtig. Ongelukkig het van die mense wat beloftes van skenkings aan ons gemaak het dit nooit nagekom nie.

Op 11 September 2001 het ek ’n kursus in Kaapstad bygewoon. Die verrigtinge het langer geduur as wat ek verwag het en toe ek terug by my ouerhuis was, waar ek gekuier het, het my pa vir my gesê twee vliegtuie het in die World Trade Center in New York vasgevlieg. Ek het die verslag op CNN gevolg en Madiba dadelik gebel, aangesien dit nie sy gewoonte was om in die dag nuus te kyk nie tensy hy in die motor was en omdat hy ook nie meer oor etenstyd radionuus geluister het nie. Hy was geskok en ek het die geleentheid gebruik om hom te vra vir ’n boodskap, aangesien ek geweet het die media sou gou vir kommentaar begin bel. (Wanneer enigiets van belang gebeur het, sou die media ons dadelik bel vir kommentaar en om Madiba se mening daaroor te hoor.) En hulle het ook. Ek het sy woorde van meegevoel aan die Amerikaanse publiek oorgedra. Personeellede het ons ingelig dat president Mbeki kwaad was hieroor. Hy het na bewering gevoel Madiba was te vinnig met sy verklaring. Die presidensie het gemeen die regte ding sou wees om te wag tot die president sy eie boodskap van medelye oordra.

Hoewel ek dit verstaan, voel ek Madiba het nooit sy verklaring namens die land uitgereik nie, maar as iemand wat lief is vir mense. Hoekom kon hy nie sy hartseer en simpatie deel nie? Ek was weer nie seker of dit president Mbeki of sy personeel was wat hieroor bekommerd was nie.

Die voordeel van ’n klein spannetjie was dat ons baie vinnig op situasies kon reageer. Ek is nie ekstra betaal om dag en nag met die media se navrae te werk nie, maar dit het deel van my pligte geword. Ek was Madiba se woordvoerder en persoonlike sekretaresse en ook die bestuurder van sy kantoor. Die voordeel daarvan was dat ek net twee oproepe moes maak as ons op iets moes reageer: eers aan Madiba

om te vra wat hy wou sê, en dan aan professor Gerwel om sy mening oor die saak te kry. Ons was nie in burokrasie verstrengel nie, juis omdat ons 'n klein spannetjie was, en dit het goed gewerk.

Al het die media geweet ek het nie veel ervaring hiervan nie, het hulle my verdra en met respek behandel. Soms sou Madiba, wanneer hulle nog 'n vraag wou vra nadat hy 'n nuuskonferensie afgesluit het, as 'n grap vir hulle sê: 'Julle moet na haar luister, sy is my baas.' In 'n stadium het ek 'n professor in die kommunikasiedepartement van een die plaaslike universiteite genader. Ek het hom vir leiding gevra in my hantering van die media en hy het tyd saam met my deurgebring en reëls neergelê en protokol uiteengesit. Die belangrikste hiervan was: Moenie dat die media die gebied beheer waarvoor jy verantwoordelik is nie. Maak seker jou gebied is duidelik afgebaken en dat jy self die reëls daar maak.

Ek het mooi na sy raad geluister, maar vir baie mense het ek soos 'n feeks voorgekom. Ek is as 'n leeuwyfie of 'n heks of 'n rottweiler beskryf. As poortwager van die beroemdste man in die wêreld moes ek soms onversetlik en kortaf wees. Min mense het die uitdaging verstaan van die taak om die wêreldmedia te woord te staan terwyl ek ook al my ander werk moes doen. Maar ek het vriendskappe met baie mediamense aangeknoop en ons het mekaar vertrou. Ek het uit ander se foute geleer wat ek om my gesien het en probeer om daardie strikke te vermy. Die moeite en stres van 'n lewe waarin ek elke woord moes tel kom teen 'n prys. Dis uitputtend. Maar die belangrikste raad wat enigeen my ooit gegee het, was: 'Moet nooit vir die media lieg nie.' Daar is letterlik 'n miljoen maniere om enige situasie te hanteer en Madiba was die beste leermeester wat my kon wys hoe om daardie regte manier raak te sien. Leuens was nooit 'n opsie nie.

Ons sou in September 2001 'n besoek aan die VSA bring om 'n spesiale sessie van die Verenigde Nasies by te woon. Ons het eers gedink die vergadering sou afgelas word as gevolg van 9/11, maar hulle het besluit om voort te gaan. Werkers was nog steeds besig met die opruiming en ons het die toneel besoek. Dit was aandoenlik en ek was diep geraak. Dit was net 'n paar weke na die aanval en daar het 'n waas oor die gebied gehang. Dit was asof ek die siele van daardie duisende mense nog steeds in die lug kon aanvoel. Die werkers het almal opgehou toe hulle Madiba sien en hom toegejuig. Eers toe ons

op die toneel gestaan het, het die diepte van die tragedie my getref. Madiba was duidelik geskok deur dit wat hy gesien het. Ons het ’n kort rukkie met die destydse burgemeester, Rudy Giuliani, gepraat en hy het vir ons verduidelik wat die opruimingsproses alles behels.

Na ons besoek aan New York het ons probeer om kontak met president George W. Bush te maak, maar hy het nooit ons oproepe beantwoord nie. Ons het besef watter groot uitdaging vir hom voorlê. Ek het die sogenaamde ‘Situation Room’ by die Withuis gebel en gevra of die president ’n tydjie sou afknyp om met meneer Mandela te praat. Daar is ook van ’n mens verwag om vooraf te sê waaroor jy wou praat. Ek het verduidelik dat ons in die VSA was en dat Madiba sy steun wou bied vir die uitdagings waardeur die president in die gesig gestaar is. Of president Bush net nie met hom wou praat nie en of die persoon in die ‘Situation Room’ ’n besluit namens hom geneem het, sal ons nooit weet nie.

Ons was steeds deel van die onderhandelings tussen die strydende partye oor Burundi, eers in Arusha in Tanzanië en daarna in Johannesburg, waarheen regter Mark Bomani hulle gebring het en waar Madiba hul weergawes van die konflik kon aanhoor. Baie van die rebelle was nog nooit voorheen in Suid-Afrika nie en hulle was duidelik beïndruk en opgewonde om in Johannesburg te wees. Hulle was nie enigsins nader aan ’n vredesooreenkoms nie. Die samesprekings het twee jaar geduur. In daardie tyd sou ons na Arusha reis, ’n dorp naby die voet van Kilimanjaro in Tanzanië, waar die gesprekke plaasgevind het. Die strydende partye moes op neutrale grondgebied byeenkom. Madiba het alle partye ferm aangespreek tydens die onderhandelings. Ons besoeke was kort, aangesien die geriewe in Arusha beperk was. Hy sou ure lank in vergaderings deurbring waar hy sou onderhandel, maar ook almal kragtig teregwys. Soms was ek en professor Gerwel senuweeagtig en verleë omdat hy party mense streng aangespreek het. Maar hy was nooit oneerbiedig nie. En ondanks sy onversetlikheid en vasbeslotenheid het die partye eenvoudig nie kopgegee nie. Ons was net ’n paar keer in Bujumbura in Burundi en terwyl ons daar was, kon ons skote in die verte hoor soos die skietery in die berge voortwoed. In die boek *Conversations with Myself* het Madiba geskryf: ‘Daar is twee soorte leiers: a) dié wat onvoorspelbaar is en wat die een dag tot iets sou instem en dit die

volgende dag verwerp; en b) dié wat standvastig is, voet by stuk hou en ’n eergevoel en ’n visie het. Vir my was dit duidelik dat Madiba meer geduld met die partye sou gehad het as hulle konsekwent opgetree het en tot ’n oplossing verbind was. Hy sou dan ook respek vir hul leierskapstyl kon toon.

Presidente Benjamin Mkapa van Tanzanië, Yoweri Museveni van Uganda en Daniel arap Moi van Kenia, die aanliggende lande, sou saam met ons vergaderings in Arusha bywoon. Hulle almal het na Madiba as ‘Mzi’ verwys, wat ‘die groot een’ beteken. Mense was vriendelik en gasvry, maar dit was ’n proses wat veels te veel van Madiba se energie geëis het en ek dink hy kon ’n groter verskil gemaak het as hy daardie energie in sy eie land gebruik het om die regering te help om dienslewering aan die massas te versnel – iets wat kritiek geword het vir ANC-ondersteuners. Maar dit het nie gelyk of die Mbeki-regering sy hulp wou hê nie. Hulle het dit as inmenging gesien.

Na twee jaar se onderhandelings in Tanzanië het Madiba president Bill Clinton van Amerika, president Jacques Chirac van Frankryk en ander genader om die ondertekening van ’n tussentydse vredesooreenkoms te ondersteun. Al die partye in Burundi sou hieraan meedoen met president Pierre Buyoya as tussentydse staatshoof. Ek het nie gedink hulle sou die ooreenkoms onderteken nie, maar Madiba het dag en nag, soms tot drieuur die oggend, met die partye gepraat en hulle oortuig dat hulle die ooreenkoms uit respek vir die president van die Verenigde State van Amerika moes teken. Madiba het gesê hul leierskap sou swak vertoon en mense sou dink hulle is nie ernstig oor vrede nie.

As ek nou daaraan terugdink, is dit snaaks dat hy die titel van die president van die VSA gebruik het om hulle om te praat. Die rede waarom hulle nie wou instem nie, was onredelik en hy het alle ander moontlikhede uitgeput terwyl hy hulle probeer oortuig het dat vrede die enigste oplossing was. Daar was ’n begroting vir die vredesproses en elke deelnemer het ’n dagtoelaag, etes en verblyf in Arusha ontvang tydens die samesprekings. Vir baie rebelle wat in die bos in Burundi in ’n oorlog betrokke was, was dit lonend om by hierdie vergaderings geld te verdien om hul stryd te finansier. Om dié rede het hulle die proses so lank as moontlik uitgerek en het soms vir twee

of drie weke daar gebly, terwyl ons net vir twee of drie dae op die allermeeste daar was. Die mense wat aan die onderhandelings deelgeneem het, was almal hoogs opgevoed en baie van hulle het opleiding in Europa ontvang.Daar was geen manier waarop hulle nie kon verstaan dat 'n vredesverdrag tot almal se voordeel sou strek nie. Maar soos wat gereeld in soortgelyke omstandighede gebeur, was hulle nie altyd gewillig om persoonlike mag ter wille van hul land op te offer nie. Madiba sou hulle onophoudelik daaraan herinner dat dit 'n teken van 'n gebrek aan leierseienskappe is. Ten spyte van die feit dat dit soms gevoel het asof hy hulle selfs beledig, was daar geen vordering nie.

President Buyoyo was 'n indrukwekkende, sjarmante, intelligente heer, behalwe vir die wit sokkies wat hy gedra het. Op 18 April 2001 het rebelle 'n radiostasie in Bujumbura beset en die nuus het vinnig versprei dat dit die begin van 'n staatsgreep was. Madiba kon vir 'n hele paar uur nie bereik word nie. Ek kon ook nie dadelik vir professor Gerwel in die hande kry nie en regter Bomani se foon was af. Die media het ons kantoor begin bel om bevestiging van die staatsgreep te kry. Aanvanklik was ek sarkasties daaroor en het die eerste inbeller gevra of hy/sy gedink het ek sou weet as daar 'n staatsgreep plaasvind waar ek in my kantoor in Johannesburg sit. Ek het toe besluit om president Buyoyo te bel, aangesien sy nommer die enigste een was wat ek gehad het en omdat hy sou kon bevestig of daar 'n staatsgreep aan die gang was of nie. Hy was so vriendelik soos altyd en bly om van 'Mzi' se kantoor te hoor. 'O, mejuffrou Zelda, ek is so bly om van jou te hoor. Hoe gaan dit met Mzi?' het hy gevra. Hy het gesê dis bloot net 'n klein groepie rebelle wat die radiostasie beset het. En ek het vir hom gesê wat die internasionale nuusbulletins berig het en hom gevra om dringend 'n verklaring uit te reik en die gerugte te ontken, en van ons kant af kon ons dan bevestig dat daar nié 'n staatsgreep was nie. Ek onthou duidelik dat ek planne gehad het om daardie aand iewers te gaan kuier, maar pleks daarvan moes ek medianavrae beantwoord. Toe Madiba uiteindelik beskikbaar geword het, het ek hom dadelik oor die gebeure ingelig. Hy het gelag oor die onnodige beroering waarvan hy geheel en al onbewus was.

By geleentheid het doktor Percy Yutar versoek om Madiba te sien. Hy was die staatsaanklaer in die verhoor waarin Madiba tot lewenslange

tronkstraf gevonnis is. Hy het finansiële probleme ondervind en hy wou hê Madiba moes hom help om dokumente van die Rivonia-verhoor te verkoop. Hulle het mekaar een keer sedert die verhoor gesien terwyl Madiba president was en hy doktor Yutar genooi het vir middagete in die presidentswoning in Pretoria. Doktor Yutar het verduidelik dat hy tevergeefs probeer het om die regering te oorreed om die dokumente by hom te koop. Gelukkig is die dokumente later deur die Oppenheimers en Douw Steyn aangekoop. Die meeste daarvan is nou in die Nasionale Argiewe.

Toe Madiba vir Yutar in die 1990's die eerste keer oorgenooi het, het ek die man jammer gekry omdat ek geweet het hy moes met sy gewete saamleef. Nou was ek egter gewalg deur die feit dat hierdie man wat Madiba lewenslank tronk toe gestuur het 'n wonderlike, vrye lewe geniet het en dan van Madiba verwag het om hom te help om die dokumente wat daartoe bygedra het dat hy tronk toe gestuur is, te verkoop. Al die dokumente was staatseiendom: hoe het hy dit na sy aftrede vir sy persoonlike argief in die hande gekry? Die hele idee het my ongemaklik laat voel. Nog voordat Madiba geweier het, het ek uit beginsel besluit ek wil niks daarmee te doen hê nie.

Op 2 November 2001 het Douw Steyn die huis wat hy vir Madiba op sy private wildreservaat in Limpopo gebou het, geopen. Die plaas se naam was Shambala. Hy het die huis vir Madiba gebou as 'n wegbreekplekkie. Shambala is die Tibetaanse woord vir 'hemel op aarde'. Douw se vrygewigheid het nie opgehou nadat hy Madiba in die vroeë 1990's ses maande lank gehuisves het toe hy en Winnie Madikizela-Mandela uitmekaar is nie. Voor die huis gebou is, het Douw vir Madiba en mevrou Machel na die plaas in die Waterberg genooi. Dit was 'n ontspanne middagete saam met Douw, sy vrou Carolyn en die plaaspersoneel. Met hul terugkeer het Madiba en mevrou Machel vir my gesê Douw het aangebied om 'n huis op die plaas te bou waar hulle kon ontspan, aangesien niemand hulle daar sou kon pla nie. Die plaas was baie privaat. Madiba en 'Mum', soos wat ons mevrou Machel in navolging van Madiba begin noem het, het goed geweet om nie Douw se aanbod van die hand te wys nie, aangesien Douw dit eenvoudig nie sou aanvaar nie. In 'n japtrap het hy die allermooiste huis vir hulle opgerig, selfs nog voordat sy eie huis daar voltooi was.

Douw Steyn het my in baie opsigte aan Jay Gatsby herinner. Hy sou altyd op kort kennisgewing groot, weelderige partytjies by een van sy huise hou. Madiba het net ’n paar daarvan bygewoon, maar hy het sy tye saam met Douw geniet en is altyd vermaak deur die buitensporige leefstyl van die rykes en beroemdes. Douw sou Madiba van een van sy enorme transaksies vertel en die feit dat een mens soveel rykdom besit, het Madiba geamuseer. Madiba het Douw die eerste keer ontmoet toe ANC-lede hulle kort na sy vrylating aan mekaar voorgestel het. Toe Madiba Soweto in die middel-negentigerjare verlaat het nadat hy en mevrou Winnie Madikizela Mandela se paaie geskei het, het hy vir ses maande by Douw in Johannesburg tuisgegaan. Hier het hy *Long Walk to Freedom* klaar geskryf en gereeld met ANC-amptenare vergader om ’n tussentydse Grondwet te finaliseer. Dié huis is later omskep in die Saxon-hotel.

Uiteindelik was daar nou ’n plekkie waar ons kon wegkruip. Hoewel Madiba lief was vir mense en graag saam met hulle wou wees, was dit moeilik om in die stad vrede en stilte te vind. In die stad is hy altyd oorval deur versoeke van baie mense wat hy graag tevrede wou stel, maar as daar ’n plek was waar dit moeilik was vir ander om hom in die hande te kry, kon hy ruimte skep waar hy kon dink en miskien skryf. Shambala is ’n hele entjie uit Johannesburg en ons almal het saamgestem dat min mense die moeite sou doen om daarheen te reis om Madiba te besoek. Hy sou hierdie huis ’n paar keer besoek en ons beveel om sy dagboek vir ’n paar weke skoon te hou wanneer hy daar was.

Die bekendstelling van die huis op Shambala het saamgeval met ’n besoek aan Suid-Afrika deur deelnemers aan die Mejuffrou Wêreldkompetisie. Douw het hulle in daardie tyd ook op sy plaas onthaal. Voorheen het Madiba altyd ’n punt daarvan gemaak om Mejuffrou Suid-Afrika te ontmoet. Daar word elke jaar ’n nuwe een gekroon. Een jaar het hy gesê hy wil Mejuffrou Wêreld ontmoet tydens haar besoek aan die land, maar in daardie stadium het hy Mejuffrou Suid-Afrika nog nie ontmoet nie en ek het hom gewaarsku dat hy in die moeilikheid sou wees by die publiek as hy nie eers aandag aan ons eie mense gee nie. Hy het saamgestem en Mejuffrou Suid-Afrika eerste ontmoet. Hy sou die storie later ’n paar keer vertel en spog oor die

goeie advies wat ek hom gegee het. Ek sou verkies het om eerder onthou te word as die persoon wat hom raad gegee het om 'n groot wêreldoorlog te vermy, maar hy was baie beïndruk met my advies om Mejuffrou Suid-Afrika eerste te ontmoet. Van Madiba se vriende en kennisse het gekla dat hy te veel tyd met skoonheidskoninginne deurbring en dat dit nie goed was vir sy beeld na buite nie. Dit was net nog 'n stryd wat ons moes stry. Hy het skoonheid bewonder en hierdie doellose interaksies het plaasgevind omdat hy die geselskap van die beeldskone vroue geniet het wat op hul beurt gek was oor hom.

Vroeg in November 2001 het ons Brussel besoek, waar hy met premier Guy Verhofstadt oor die skikking in Burundi gepraat het. Hulle het ook die Europese Unie se moontlike steun aan daardie land bespreek. Ons was op 1 November in Bujumbura, waar die nuwe tussentydse regering beëdig is. Ek het gevoel die vredeskikking was effens gedwonge, maar indien Madiba nie daarop sou aangedring het nie, sou hulle vandag nog besig wees met onderhandelings. Hy was verlig toe dit verby was. 'n Suid-Afrikaanse vredesmag is steeds in Burundi teenwoordig.

In Desember is ons na Tripoli om Broeder Leier Ghadaffi weer te besoek. Daarna is ons na Amerika om 'n geldinsamelingsgeleentheid by te woon ten bate van die Mosaic-stigting wat deur Prins Bandar se vrou bestuur is. Ons het 'n draai in Maryland gemaak en die Verenigde Nasies oor die situasie in Burundi toegespreek. Toe het ons na Toronto en Ottawa gereis, waar Madiba Kanada se hoogste eerbewys van eerste minister Jean Chretién ontvang het. Ons was uitgeput na 'n vermoeiende jaar en Madiba se ouderdom het sake nie vergemaklik nie, maar sy ywer om 'n verskil te maak was nog net so sterk soos voorheen. Hy wou voortgaan om goeie nuus oor die nuwe Suid-Afrika aan die wêreld te bring en buitelandse beleggers aanmoedig om hul vertroue in die land te behou. En tussendeur wou hy ook die bande met sy vriende koester.

Voor ons reis na Tripoli het ons weer Saoedi-Arabië, Oman, Bahrein en Koeweit aangedoen om geld in te samel vir die stigting. Ek het gehou van Oman en die koning van Bahrein was uiters gasvry, net soos die emir van Oman. In Koeweit het iets vreemds egter gebeur.

Ons almal het al soms die badseep of toiletware in die badkamers geneem wanneer ons in weelderige hotelle tuisgaan. In hierdie spesifieke gastehuis is ’n baie duur seep, naskeermiddel, lyfwasmiddel ensovoorts vir Madiba se gebruik uitgesit. Terwyl ons op ’n afspraak weg van die gastehuis was, het iemand, waarskynlik ’n lyfwag aangesien hulle die enigste mense was wat agtergebly het, besluit om ’n paar van hierdie toiletware te vat. Wat hy nie geweet het nie, was dat Madiba voor sy vertrek op elke enkele artikel ag geslaan het. Toe hy na sy kamer terugkeer, het hy agtergekom iets is vermis en hy het die veiligheidsmense ingeroep om parade te staan. Hy het my ook laat roep as getuie. Die regsman in Madiba het sy eie hofsaak gehou. Ek wou ineenkrimp van die verleentheid namens die lyfwagte.

Hy het hulle ondervra en die ‘skurk’ die kans gebied om die toiletware terug te sit, anders sou hy aan die minister van polisie moes rapporteer wanneer hulle tuiskom en indien die ‘skurk’ nie skuld sou beken nie, sou hy versoek dat almal afgedank word. Hy wou gehad het ek moes die minister daar en dan uit Koeweit bel om die saak aan te meld, maar ek het gedink dis beter dat ons dit los tot ons terug is in Suid-Afrika, en ek het voorgegee dat ek nie die minister dadelik kon opspoor nie. Madiba was baie ernstig. Die volgende oggend was die toiletware terug en hy het daarvan vergeet soos hy beloof het. Hy het nie omgegee as jy toiletware uit jou eie badkamer verwyder nie, maar nie uit syne nie. En met ons vertrek het hy nie een van die artikels met hom saamgeneem nie. Hy het alles net so onaangeraak en onoopgemaak gelos. Hy wou nooit van ons gasheer se welwillendheid misbruik maak nie en het dieselfde van almal verwag.

By ’n ander geleentheid het iemand eetgerei van ons gasheer gegaps en toe sy senior hom betrap, het ek geweet ek moet die saak baie taktvol hanteer aangesien Madiba nie so iets sou duld nie. Ek het besluit ons moet die saak intern oplos eerder as om die ‘advokaat’ in te roep om ‘aanklaer’ te speel. Omdat die spanne beurte gemaak het om saam met ons te reis, het mense nooit geweet wat met ander gebeur terwyl ons oorsee was nie en om dié rede het die betrokke span nog nooit met die ‘aanklaer’ te doen gehad nie. Ek het daarop aangedring dat die oortreder binne die magstrukture van die polisie aan tugstappe onderwerp moes word, selfs al is die eetgerei voor ons vertrek aan die eienaar teruggegee. As daar een ding is wat Nelson

Mandela nie kon verduur nie, is dit oneerlikheid, of dit nou ’n koekie seep of ’n politieke agenda behels het.

Vir my was Madiba ’n gawe en vrygewige siel, maar beginselvas en gedissiplineerd in elke sin van die woord. Ek weet nie of dit as gevolg van my Calvinistiese opvoeding of my sensitiewe persoonlikheid is nie, of die feit dat my pa se harde stem die enigste iets na aan geweld was waaraan ek tuis blootgestel is nie, maar ek word altyd bang wanneer iemand hard en in ’n kwaai stemtoon praat. Ek vermy persoonlike konfrontasie en raak eerder stil en onttrek myself geheel en al. Dis nie asof ek bang is vir alle konfrontasie nie, maar ek word senuweeagtig wanneer ander mense harder praat omdat hulle kwaad is. Dieselfde geld vir die kere wanneer Madiba sy stem verhef het. Sy stem was van nature hard en as hy nog harder gepraat het, het dit my senuweeagtig gemaak. Dis nie asof hy woede-uitbarstings gehad het nie en in die jare wat ek vir hom gewerk het, het ek net ’n paar keer gehoor hoe hy sy stem verhef. Dit was gewoonlik net in situasies wat hom werklik kwaad gemaak het, soos wanneer iemand hom verraai het of oneerlik was, of oor ’n persoonlike saak. Ek sou vir die ander persoon se onthalwe ineenkrimp en sodra daardie persoon weg was, probeer om die spanning te verlig. Mense na aan Madiba het geweet wanneer hy kwaad word. Maar hy sou nooit sy woede op iemand uithaal nie. Hy sou stil en omgekrap raak.

In die latere deel van sy presidentskap, toe ek gereeld sy kantoor in Pretoria alleen ‘beman’ het, sou ek baie keer sy lyfwag, Rory Steyn, bel wanneer hy aan diens was sodat hy vir my sy indrukke van die president se gemoedstoestand kon gee voor hy by die kantoor opdaag. Die lyfwagte sou die president se motor van sy huis in Houghton tot by die kantoor in Pretoria bestuur. Rory sou een van die mense wees wat weet of die president ernstig was of in ’n humoristiese bui, of indien sy gedagtes elders was. Rory se mening het my gehelp om die dag makliker saam met die president te begin, sonder dat ek onvanpaste opmerkings maak of hom oorvriendelik groet wanneer hy nie in die bui daarvoor was nie.

Mense het gedink die Nelson Mandela-stigting samel miljoene rande in. Maar ons het nie. Dit was duidelik makliker vir Madiba om geld vir die ANC in te samel. ’n Vryheidsbeweging eerder as ’n stigting. Die stigting was nie in daardie stadium goed gevestig nie, of eerder, sy

rigting het voortdurend verander en ek dink mense was versigtig om geld te gee omdat hulle nie geweet het of dit ’n familiestigting of ’n nieregeringsorganisasie was wat projekte in werking stel nie.

Vroeg in 2002 het ek iemand van die protokolafdeling in die president se kantoor raakgeloop. Hierdie persoon het vir my gesê foto’s en skilderye waarin Madiba voorkom, is uit die uitstalruimte by die Spierwynlandgoed in die Wes-Kaap verwyder ter voorbereiding van ’n besoek deur president Mbeki. Ek het geen rede gehad om hierdie persoon se woord in twyfel te trek nie en dis bevestig toe die storie ’n week later in die *Mail & Guardian* verskyn het. Dit het my mening versterk dat dit nie noodwendig die president self is wat kwade gevoelens teenoor Madiba gehad het nie, maar dat dit deur lede van sy personeel aangevuur is. Dit moes sekerlik vir president Mbeki ’n verleentheid gewees het om so iets in die koerant te lees. Dis so kleinlik en ek kan nie glo dat ’n president sy personeel sou beveel om enige foto’s of skildery met Nelson Mandela se gesig daarop te verwyder nie.

In Maart 2002 het Madiba my gevra om ’n galadinee vir oudstryders te reël. Dit was soortgelyk aan die teepartytjie wat ons tydens sy presidentskap vir die vroue van die veterane van die vryheidstryd by Mahlamba Ndlopfu gehou het. Hoewel die vryheidstryd reeds lank gewonne was, het hy gevoel dit is noodsaaklik om die oudstryders te vereer en hy wou nie hê dit moet lyk asof hy hulle vergeet het en net voortgaan met sy lewe na die stryd nie. Dié keer sou daar eenduisend-vyfhonderd gaste wees. Ons het vinnig geld ingesamel en ’n taakspan saamgestel om die geleentheid aan te bied.

Herinneringe aan hierdie geleentheid en die probleme waarin ek my vasgeloop het terwyl ek dit probeer reël het, sal my vir die res van my lewe bybly. Elke greintjie daarvan was egter die moeite werd toe ’n mens sien hoe die oumense se gesigte ophelder wanneer hulle vriende en kollegas na so baie jare sien. In sommige gevalle het ek nie eens geweet of die mense wat die stryd saam met hulle gestry het nog leef nie. Die meeste van hulle het ’n armoedige bestaan gevoer sonder basiese dienste ondanks hul geskiedenis in die vryheidstryd. Ek het namens hulle kwaad gevoel en gedoen wat ek kon om te verseker dat daar darem een keer op ’n feestelike manier hulde aan hulle gebring word van ons kant af.

Dit was onmoontlik om almal tevrede te stel. Madiba het eenvoudig nie daarvan gehou om lank op enige plek te bly nie. Hy wou aanhou beweeg en ek dink die dringendheid het hom aangedryf om te doen wat hy kon voor hy te oud sou wees daarvoor. Hy het minstens vyf tot sewe openbare geleenthede per week bygewoon, en by elke geleentheid was dit dieselfde storie. Daar was geen rede vir hom om twee uur lank te sit en na eindelose toesprake te luister nie. Ek onthou ’n keer toe hy ’n priester se gebed botweg beëindig het toe hy die seremoniemeester gevra het om die priester te stop. Toe ek hom later daaroor uitvra, het hy gesê hy het geen probleem met gebede nie, maar dit was nie nodig dat die priester ons almal met een lang gebed probeer bekeer nie. Hy was reg. Die priester het nie net die seën gevra en die geleentheid geopen nie, dit was langer as ’n preek.

Daar is ’n fyn lyn tussen oneerbiedige optrede en ’n besluit wanneer iets klaar sy doel gedien het. In Februarie 2003 het Mathatha Tsedu in ’n hoofartikel in die *Sunday Times* na ons gekap omdat ons Madiba nie toegelaat het om langer by die opening van ’n skool te bly nie. Mathatha het geskryf: ‘Dit was ’n verleentheid en baie mense hier sê omdat ’n wit vrou Madiba se lewe bestuur, is hy altyd haastig wanneer hy by ’n swart geleentheid is. “Ons verstaan hy bly langer by wit geleenthede,” het die organiseerder vir my gesê.’ Hy het verder geskryf:

> Ek ken vir Zelda la Grange, Mandela se persoonlike assistent, en ek twyfel of sy haar neus sou optrek vir ’n geleentheid net omdat dit swart is. Maar die vraag moet gevra word of Madiba se kantoor sy dagboek op die regte manier bestuur. Hy moet darem lank genoeg by ’n geleentheid bly sodat dit nie lyk asof hy net deurstap nie.

Dis makliker gesê as gedaan. Madiba was die een wat vooraf na ’n program sou kyk en dan vir my sê waar ek dit moes inkort. Dan was dit my plig om seker te maak dat hy vroeg wegkom, gewoonlik omtrent dertig minute na ons aankoms. Ja, dit was net ’n vlugtige deurgang, maar dis wat hy wou doen, ongeag ras, tema of plek.

Die feit is dat niemand ooit sal vergeet ek is wit nie. Ras is nog steeds ’n faktor en baie mense is nie bereid om te aanvaar ons is almal Suid-Afrikaners, ongeag ons kleur nie. Die skade wat apartheid aangerig het, word onderskat. Wanneer daar ’n probleem opduik wat niemand kan verklaar nie, word ras dikwels as rede voorgehou. Ek het by Madiba geleer dat daar twee dinge is wat jou redenasie waardeloos maak: ras en beledigings. As jou mening op ’n beginsel geskoei is, hoef jy nie na ras te gryp of jou mededinger te beledig nie. Hou by jou

beginsel en as jy nie kan nie, het jy nie ’n argument nie.

In 2008 is ek deur *City Press* en *Rapport* aangewys as een van die tien vroue van die jaar. Mathatha was toe die hoofredakteur van *City Press* en ek het die gebaar waardeer ondanks ons vroeëre verskille. Ek is seker hy het nie die keuses gemaak nie, maar hy sou beswaar kon aanteken as hy wou.

By sy optredes was daar twee goed wat Madiba nie kon verduur nie: Hy wou nie voorgesê word nie en hy wou nie in ’n wagkamer wag nie. Hy het gesê as hy betyds kon wees, kon almal betyds wees. En hy het gereeld geweier om in wagkamers te sit. Hy sou eenvoudig instap en sy teenwoordigheid sou verseker dat die verrigtinge begin, of mense gereed was of nie.

In April 2002 het Suid-Afrika sy eerste man in die ruimte gehad – Mark Shuttleworth. Mark was bekend in die land vir sy skepping van veiligheidsagteware vir internet-bankdienste wat hy vir miljarde rande oorsee verkoop het. Hy was Suid-Afrika se jongste miljardêr en natuurlik is hy ook genader om ’n skool te bou. Hy het ons ’n hele paar keer besoek en hy het ingestem om Madiba op my selfoon te bel wanneer hy in die ruimte was. Dit was baie opwindend. Ons het gekyk hoe hy die ruimte invlieg, maar die volgende dag het ons voortgegaan met ons lewens en hoewel sy reis die nuus oorheers het, het ons met ons gewone sake aangegaan.

Die reëling was dat Mark op ’n spesifieke dag sou bel, en ek het natuurlik vergeet om dit neer te skryf. My selfoon het gelui en die nommer het nie op my foon gewys nie, daar het net gestaan ‘private number’. Gewoonlik beantwoord ek nie sulke oproepe nie, maar Madiba was langsaan en het die foon hoor lui, toe moes ek antwoord. Die persoon aan die ander kant het gesê: ‘Hallo, is dit Zelda?’ Dit het geklink soos ’n oproep uit Amerika en ek was geïrriteerd omdat ek dit verpes het wanneer mense my in die dag op my foon pla om lang voorstelle aan my te maak terwyl ek besig was met Madiba.

Ek het gesê: ‘Ja, kan ek help?’

Die persoon het gesê: ‘Ek bel van die IRS.’ Ek het gewonder wat die IRS is. Ek was steeds geïrriteerd en het die man weer gevra hoe ek hom kan help. En toe sê hy: ‘Dis Mark van die IRS’. Ek het gedink dit is seker een of ander organisasie en ek het vinnig probeer dink omdat ek nie dom wou voorkom nie. Sy laaste poging was: ‘Zelda, dis Mark,

ek bel uit die ruimte.’

Genugtig! Uiteindelik het ek verstaan! En ek het gesê: ‘O, Mark! Hoe gaan dit met jou? Hou net aan vir Madiba.’

Ek het by Madiba se kantoor ingehardloop en hy het ook nie dadelik geweet wat aangaan toe ek vir hom sê dis Mark Shuttleworth en hy bel uit die ruimte nie. Dit was snaaks en later toe Mark terug was en hy ons weer kom besoek het om sy wedervaringe met ons te deel, het hy die storie geniet. Ons was baie trots op hom.

Dit was min of meer in dieselfde tyd dat Madiba tydens ’n besoek aan Qunu aangekondig het hy wil groot, volgroeide bome op sy plaas geplant hê wat die uitsig na sy huis van die hoofpad sou versper. Die N2-hoofweg het verby sy plaas geloop. Hy het dit aan my oorgelaat en ek het nie ’n benul gehad waar om te begin soek nie. Ek het my pa gebel en hom gevra of hy kontakte het wat met so iets sou kon help en hy het gesê hy sou ’n paar oproepe maak. Hy het my dringendheid oor alles in die lewe verstaan en hy het spoedig na my teruggekeer en gesê hy sal my help om iemand te vind. ’n Paar dae later het hy gesê hy het ’n kwotasie van iemand gekry en dit vir ons aangestuur. Dit was veels te duur en ek het hom dit laat weet. Hy het gesê hy sal ’n oplossing soek. Aangesien ek ’n ‘pappa se dogtertjie’ is, het ek altyd van my pa verwag om oplossings vir al my probleme te vind, en hy het. Hy het gebel en gesê hy sal dit self doen.

Ek was versigtig en skepties hieroor en ek het hom gevra om sy voorstel op skrif te stel. Madiba was ontvanklik vir die idee en het gevra of hy self met my pa kon praat. Teen dié tyd het hulle mekaar reeds ontmoet en Madiba het van my pa se aardse manier gehou. Vanweë Madiba se invloed op my het my pa se houding teenoor hom ook verander. Ek het dit toe duidelik aan Madiba gestel dat ek nie betrokke wou wees by die ooreenkoms nie en dat my pa regstreeks aan Ismail Ayob, Madiba se prokureur, moes rapporteer. Madiba het my kwelling verstaan: dat ek nie deur enigeen van nepotisme beskuldig wou word nie.

Soos ek verwag het, het my pa hart en siel in die projek gestort en die bome is kort daarna geplant. Tot op die laaste het Madiba altyd oor my ouers, en veral my pa, se welstand uitgevra. My pa het nie betaling vir sy handewerk verwag nie, net vir die aankoop van die bome en die arbeiders wat hy van elders moes inbring. Madiba het dit

baie waardeer en ons het my pa geterg en gesê: 'Sien, Pa, tye het verander … hier is Pa, met Pa se konserwatiewe verlede, besig om bome in 'n swart man se tuin te plant!' Ons sou almal daaroor lag. My pa was baie trots op die werk en elke keer wanneer ek in Qunu was, het hy my gevra hoe dit met die bome gaan. My ouers het die geleenthede waardeer wat Madiba my gebied het en dit het hulle verander en hul harte geraak. Hierdie interaksies en die waardering en respek wat Madiba aan my pa betoon het, het hom vir ewig verander.

In Februarie 2002 is ons New York toe vir die bekendstelling van die Tribeca-rolprentfees wat deur Jane Rosenthal en Robert de Niro geloods is. Na die aanval op die World Trade Center in Manhattan moes Wall Street sy reputasie as 'n veilige deel van die stad so gou moontlik hervestig. Ons is ook na 'n skemerkelkonthaal in die stadsaal genooi met die burgemeester, Michael Bloomberg, as gasheer. Ons het skemerkelkonthale saam met Madiba verpes. Mense sou hom geheel en al oorweldig en dit was boonop 'n mors van tyd om in sulke omstandighede met hom te probeer praat. Sy gehoorapparaat sou al die klank uitsny wanneer te veel mense gelyk om hom gepraat het, of as die omgewing te raserig was.

Ons het by die onthaallokaal ingestap waar omtrent tweehonderd mense saam was. Daar was niemand om ons te ontvang nie en ons het deur die skare begin stap totdat ons by 'n groepie kinders in die vertrek uitgekom het. Madiba het dadelik met hulle begin praat. Kinders het hom soos 'n magneet aangetrek. Hy moes vooroor buig om te hoor wat hulle sê en ek het my bes probeer om alles te herhaal sodat hy op 'n gepaste manier kon antwoord. Terwyl hy vooroor gebuk gestaan het, het 'n man van agter af gekom en aan sy hemp getrek, en ek het gedink: Wat op aarde! Hy het aangehou en ek het na hom omgedraai en gesê: 'Verskoon my, meneer, hoekom trek u meneer Mandela se hemp? Hy is besig met die kinders.'

Hy het omgekyk asof hy hulp soek, maar toe sê hy vir my: 'Ek wil hê meneer Mandela moet hierdie mense groet, hulle is my vriende.'

My bloed het gekook en ek het gesê: 'Wel, kan jy hom asseblief kans gee om klaar te maak met die kinders?'

Hy het toe so half tong in die kies gesê: 'Weet jy wie ek is?'

Ek het nors geantwoord: 'Nee, maar hou asseblief op daarmee.'

'n Derde persoon het verskyn en in my oor gefluister: 'Dit is

burgemeester Bloomberg, hy is die gasheer van die aand.' Jy kon my met 'n veer omtik, maar nadat ek om verskoning gevra het, het ek nogtans gesê hy moenie aan Madiba se hemp trek nie, aangesien hy reeds onvas was op sy voete. Ek het gesê hy sou omdraai sodra hy klaar is met die kinders. Die burgemeester het nie van my gehou nie, maar hy het geen keuse gehad nie, hy moes doen wat ek vra.

Toe ons later deur die vertrek stap, het ek nog 'n bekende gesig gesien, dié van die Britse akteur Hugh Grant. Almal in die vertrek wou 'n foto saam met Madiba laat neem en dit het natuurlik vinnig in chaos ontaard. Hugh Grant het nie gevra om Madiba te ontmoet nie, maar aan sy glimlag en die uitdrukking op sy gesig kon ek duidelik sien hy was opgewonde om hom te sien. Hugh het langs Madiba gaan staan en sy eie kamera omgedraai sodat hy 'n foto van hulle saam kon neem. Dis wat ons deesdae 'n 'selfie' noem. Ek het toe gesê: 'Verskoon my, meneer Grant, ek is meneer Mandela se assistent, kan ek jou asseblief help om 'n foto te neem?' Ek het die 'nie-amptelike amptelike fotograaf' geword omdat ek altyd foto's van mense saam met Madiba geneem het, en ek het 'n kenner van ander mense se kameras geword. Ek het nie omgegee as die tyd en plek reg was daarvoor nie. Hy was dankbaar. Ek het nie probeer om aan Madiba te verduidelik wie hy was nie.

Op 16 Februarie 2003 het Mathatha Tsedu die Treatment Action Campaign in 'n hoofartikel aangeval omdat hulle Madiba se gesig op 'n T-hemp gebruik het. Die TAC was aan die voorpunt van druk op die regering om antiretrovirale vigsmedisyne aan armes beskikbaar te stel, iets wat Madiba ondersteun het en waarvoor hy bereid was om in die openbaar te veg. Suid-Afrika was vinnig besig om die land in die wêreld met die grootste aantal vigslyers te word. Die regering het nie vigsmedikasie gratis beskikbaar gestel nie. Madiba het probeer om met die destydse minister van gesondheid, dokter Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, daaroor te praat en hy was ontsteld en gewalg omdat sy so min aandag aan hierdie vraagstuk gegee het. Madiba het probeer om agter die skerms vir die gesiglose, naamlose mense te veg. In daardie stadium was Suid-Afrika besig om 'n grap in die oë van die wêreld te word weens sy vigsbeleid. Madiba het nie omgegee dat die TAC sy gesig gebruik nie en Mathatha het Madiba se kantoor gekritiseer en gesê ons tree verkeerd op deur nie Madiba se beeld teen dié soort

misbruik te beskerm nie. Ek was besig om opstandig te raak oor baie dinge en hierdie was een daarvan. Vir my beteken misbruik dat baie mense sonder ’n stem of ’n plek waar hulle hul mening kon uitspreek nie die nodige medikasie ontvang het nie en dat miljoene mense gesterf het. Deur nié behandeling aan hierdie mense te verskaf nie, is hulle hul menseregte ontneem.

Ons was erg gefrustreerd oor die feit dat die regering nie na ons teruggekom het wanneer Madiba die kwessie van vigsmedikasie met hulle wou bespreek nie. By een geleentheid het minister Tshabalala-Msimang hom vir ’n halfuur gesien, en die ontmoeting toe skielik beëindig en gesê sy het ’n afspraak om ’n rok aan te pas.

Vigsontkenning het tot in die hoogste kringe voorgekom. President Mbeki het gesê hy het nog nooit iemand met vigs gesien nie, maar Madiba het talle mense gehelp om vigsmedikasie in die hande te kry; mense wat dan sou herstel en gehaltelewens lei. Die president het ook ontken dat daar ’n verband tussen MIV en vigs bestaan. Ons het ’n jong vrou gehelp wat op die randjie van die dood was toe sy Madiba kom sien het om raad te vra. Sy kon nie meer self eet nie. Hy het haar in ’n hospitaal laat opneem en toe die medisyne newe-effekte veroorsaak het, is ’n ander reeks medikasie voorgeskryf. Sy is later uit die hospitaal ontslaan en is vandag gelukkig getroud met kinders en leef ’n normale lewe. As gevolg van plaaslike en oorsese druk, asook druk van mense soos president Clinton, verskaf die regering nou antiretrovirale medikasie en Suid-Afrika het minder vigsgevalle as vantevore.

Die aand van 5 Mei 2003 het ek ’n oproep ontvang van iemand wat my meegedeel het Madiba se beste vriend, Walter Sisulu, is pas oorlede. Hulle was saam in die gevangenis en hulle was vriende sedert hul jeugjare. Ek het dadelik vir Kgalema Motlanthe, van wie ek gehou het en vir wie ek respek gehad het, gebel om te vra of hy dit kon bevestig. Kgalema was die sekretaris-generaal van die ANC. Hy het toe nog nie daarvan gehoor nie, maar ’n ander bron het dit aan ons bevestig. Dit was laat in die nag en Madiba was vas aan die slaap, maar ek het geweet hy sou dadelik wou weet indien enigiets met oom Walter gebeur. Mevrou Machel was in haar tuisdorp in Mosambiek en kon nie bereik word nie en ek het besluit om na Madiba se huis te ry. Toe ek daar aankom, het ek vir die huispersoneel gesê hoekom ek

daar was. Ek het geweet dis nie die tipe ding wat 'n mens oor die foon doen nie en dat dit 'n groot skok vir Madiba sou wees. Ek is op na sy slaapkamer en vir die eerste keer was ek bang om hom wakker te maak. Wanneer ons op reis was, moes ek hom gereeld wakker maak, maar hierdie keer was dit anders.

Ek het eers aan die duvet om sy voete geraak en gesê: 'Khulu, Khulu, ek moet met u praat, asseblief, word wakker.'

Die tweede keer het ek nader aan sy skouer aan die duvet gevat en hy het wakker geword. Al wat hy gesê het, was: 'Ja, Zeldina?' asof hy verwag het dat ek hom iets wou vra.

Ek het gesê: 'Ek is bitter jammer dat ek die een moet wees wat u hiervan moet vertel, maar oom Walter is oorlede.' Hy het my óf nie gehoor nie óf hy was diep geskok. Ek het herhaal wat ek gesê het.

Met die een hand het hy aan sy hare en voorkop geraak en gesê: 'Goeie Here.' Dit het hom 'n tydjie geneem om regop te sit. Ek het besluit om 'n rukkie aan die voetenent van sy bed te sit om seker te maak daar skort niks en ek het weer gesê ek is baie jammer om die draer van sulke slegte nuus te wees. Ek het ook gesê ek het gedink hy sou wou weet en hy het gesê: 'Ja, ja, natuurlik.'

Ons het besluit ons sou vroeg die volgende oggend na die huis van die Sisulu's vertrek en hy het my gevra om hom vroeg wakker te bel. Dit was vir Madiba swaar om tannie Albertina, oom Walter se vrou, se hartseer te sien. Hy het hierdie mense feitlik sy hele lewe lank geken en hulle was deel van hom. Hy het baie respek vir oom Walter gehad en het altyd gesê hoe hy sy eenvoud en nederigheid bewonder. Hy het ook gepraat van sy goeie leierskap en die feit dat hy altyd gewillig was om mense van agter die skerms te inspireer en aan te moedig. Ek het gedink ja, dis presies soos dit was. Oom Walter het Madiba na die voorgrond geskuif in die jare toe hulle in die tronk was. Madiba het gereeld stories oor hulle interaksies vertel en oor die dinge wat hulle bespreek het. Hierdie was 'n hartseerdag vir almal. Suid-Afrika het een van sy grootste helde verloor.

Dit was tyd vir Madiba om briek aan te draai. Hy kon eenvoudig nie teen dieselfde pas voortgaan nie en hy kon nie aan alle versoeke van sy vriende, kollegas en kennisse voldoen nie. Hy sou voortaan sy tyd tussen Johannesburg, Qunu en Maputo verdeel en ook tyd in Shambala deurbring wanneer hy wou skryf. Die huis by Shambala het

hom ook die geleentheid gebied om hooggeplaaste gaste te ontvang wat nie andersins by ’n wildplaas sou uitkom nie.

’n Aantal vooraanstaande kunstenaars het voorgestel dat Madiba se tronknommer gebruik word om ’n veldtog teen vigs te begin. Madiba was sterk gekant teen die gebruik van sy beeld vir kommersiële of liefdadigheidsdoeleindes. Dit is hoekom die kunstenaars eerder voorgestel het om sy tronknommer vir die vigsveldtog te gebruik. Hulle wou die 46664-veldtog met ’n groot musiekkonsert in Kaapstad bekend stel en almal het onderneem om sonder betaling op te tree. Terwyl van die sangers besig was om vir die vertoning in Kaapstad te repeteer, het die uitvoerende hoof van die Nelson Mandela-stigting besluit Madiba moet met die kunstenaars praat om hulle te bedank vir hul toewyding in hul pogings om ’n saak wat hom so na aan die hart lê te ondersteun.

In daardie stadium was ons by Shambala. ’n Telefoonoproep is gereël vir ’n tydjie wanneer Madiba met hulle almal tegelyk sou kon praat. Ek het hul name uitgetik, byvoorbeeld ‘Brian May – Queen’ en ‘Dave Stewart – Eurythmics’ nadat ek dit met Madiba bespreek het. Ek het aan hom probeer verduidelik wie almal was en vir hom ’n vel papier gegee met al die name daarop om hom te help om dit te onthou. Brian May was eerste aan die beurt. Ek het langs Madiba gestaan en op die papier vir hom gewys met wie hy praat. Toe Brian antwoord, het hy gesê: ‘Hallo, Madiba, hoe gaan dit?’

Madiba het hoflik gesê: ‘Hallo, Brian, dit gaan goed met my en met jou?’ Brian het gesê dit gaan met hom ook goed en dat hy opgewonde was om deel hieraan te kon hê.

En toe vra Madiba: ‘Hoe gaan dit met die koningin?’ Hy het toe met Dave Stewart gepraat en gevra: ‘Hoe gaan dit met die Eurythmics?’ Hy het geen idee gehad dat dit die name van popgroepe was nie. Tydens sy gevangenskap het hy nie tegnologiese ontwikkelings gevolg nie en dit was moeilik om selfs aan hom te verduidelik wat ’n CD is, wat nog te sê musikante en groepe van wie ons almal geweet het. Ek het vir hom met die verkeerde soort inligting oorlaai. Dit was kostelik om hom dop te hou in sy onskuld; sy bedoelinge was altyd edel.

Vroeër daardie jaar het Madiba vyf-en-tagtig geword. Die uitvoerende hoof van die stigting het my gevra om die verjaardagvieringe te reël. Ek het geld daarvoor ingesamel en meer as

eenduisend-tweehonderd gaste na die formele geleentheid genooi. Madiba se kennisse van reg oor die wêreld is uitgenooi: ondersteuners, vriende, politici, koninklikes ensovoorts. Ek het vermoed dat ek in die spervuur sou wees wanneer mense oor die gastelys begin kla. Ek het almal, van tuiniers tot koninklikes, genooi om seker te maak die groep was geheel en al verteenwoordigend. Ek het dag en nag gewerk en my taak was eenvoudig: ons moes seker maak Madiba word tydens sy leeftyd vereer. Toe ons om en by middernag na afloop van die geleentheid op pad was na die hysbak, het mevrou Machel gesê: 'Welgedaan, Zeldina. Madiba is vanaand waarlik vereer.' Daardie woorde het my bygebly ondanks al die kritiek wat ek moes verduur. Mense wat gekla het dat ons Madiba in 'n popster verander omdat daar soveel beroemdes by die geleentheid was, het nie die tuiniers, motorbestuurders en veiligheidsmense raakgesien wat ook gaste daar was nie. Die media het hulle nie belangrik genoeg geag om enige aandag aan hulle te gee nie. Dit was ook so dat bekendes altyd versoek is om gratis op te tree wanneer ons hulp van die internasionale gemeenskap gevra het.

Madiba het van partytjies gehou. Hy het die gastelys 'n hele paar keer bestudeer en elke persoon wat daarop was, goedgekeur. Party lede van die familie was kwaad omdat hulle nie aan die hooftafel gesit het nie, maar daar was koninklikes en staatshoofde. Nie almal is na Madiba se negentigste verjaardag op sy plaas in Qunu genooi nie, en toe mevrou Machel daarop aandring dat ek moet gaan, is ek met opset by die kindertafel, ver agter in die tent, laat sit. Nie asof ek gedink het ek moet aan die hooftafel sit nie, maar dit was 'n duidelike teken van wat party van die familielede van my rol in sy lewe gedink het, en dit was ook wat ek van hulle verwag het. Ek het nooit my probleme met Madiba bespreek nie omdat ek gevoel het hy het genoeg waaroor hy hom moes bekommer. Maar daardie dag moes ek miskien met hom gepraat het.

Op 7 November het Madiba na Shambala gereis waar ons gereël het dat hy die naweek saam met ander voormalige gevangenes van Robbeneiland sou kon deurbring. Hierdie keer was dit 'n kleiner groepie mense wat na aan hom was in die tyd van die vryheidstryd. Dit is steeds een van my gunsteling-herinneringe om te kon sien hoe

hulle mekaar se geselskap waardeer terwyl hulle terugdink aan die ou dae. Almal het hul besoek aan Shambala geniet en ons het seker gemaak hulle word bederf. Dit was baie lekker vir my om na hul stories te luister en hoe hulle mekaar terg. Hierdie was die manne wat die vryheidstryd aangedryf het, sabotasie beplan het en probeer het om die apartheidsregering te laat wakker skrik. Hulle het hul lewe in die tronk deurgebring en hulle was almal ou mans wat hul senior jare geniet het. Uiteindelik was hulle vry. Dit was ’n ware reünie en almal het probeer om mekaar se stories te oortref. Dit was een van daardie ware kosbare geleenthede.

Ons het ’n lang pad gestap in Suid-Afrika. Hier het ek dit geniet om saam met voormalige Robbeneilanders te kuier, terwyl ek in my grootwordjare gedink het dis ’n goeie ding dat hulle vir die res van hul lewe opgesluit bly. Ek het lief geraak vir baie van hulle, soos Ahmed Kathrada, Eddie Daniels, Mac Maharaj en Andrew Mlangeni. Hulle is die mense wat ek moes bedank omdat hulle Madiba se gees in die tronk lewend gehou het. En ek het baie kere gewonder of hulle ooit moed opgegee het tydens hul tyd in die gevangenis en of hulle hulle ooit sou kon verbeel dat hulle daardie dag daar sou wees, op ’n private wildplaas, om saam met Madiba terug te dink aan die ou dae.

9

Holidays and Friends

By now we were spending weeks without end at Shambala. Madiba often invited people to come and visit him on the farm and we had to be mindful to not allow Shambala to become just another venue for people to flock to where he would soon feel overwhelmed by visitors. On one such occasion he invited Zwelinzima Vavi and Blade Nzimande, the President of the Council of South African Trade Unions and General Secretary of the South African Communist Party respectively. Madiba enjoyed lunch with them after which he asked me to accompany them on a game drive, which I did. Shambala hosts the Big Five game animals and one could easily see four of the Big Five, including lion and elephant in a short game drive. I liked Blade and Zweli as they had always treated me with respect and dignity despite all the whispering about my white presence in Madiba's life. They never considered me as just the hired help. By now the SACP and Cosatu were in a tripartite alliance with the ANC. Zweli and Blade enjoyed the game drive and at one point I turned to them and said, 'You are not allowed to enjoy this, are you?' They laughed and I continued: 'Communists and socialists are not allowed to enjoy capitalism, so if you're enjoying it, just don't show it!'

Towards the end of 2003 Madiba received a visit from Sol Kerzner, the hotel tycoon from South Africa. In the past, people usually knew South Africa for two things: Nelson Mandela and Sun City. Sol built Sun City to much controversy in the mid 1980s, as the property is situated in what was then known as Bophuthatswana, one of South Africa's 'homelands', run by President Mangope. Mangope was perceived to be supportive of the apartheid government in the 1980s. After his release Madiba called Sol and convinced him to show

support for rebuilding South Africa, which Sol was happy to help with. Eventually Sol sold his stake in Sun City and started Kerzner International abroad. He told Madiba about their resort in Mauritius and extended an invitation to Madiba for a holiday. We made arrangements for Madiba, Mrs Machel and some of the grandchildren to go.

It was like arriving in Paradise. Sol had booked a private villa for Madiba and Mrs Machel at the One & Only Le Saint Géran Hotel in Mauritius while the rest of us were accommodated in the hotel adjacent to the villa. Of course Sol knew that Madiba and Mum came with an entourage; no President or former President travels without. One also had to be careful not to make people feel, no matter how wealthy they were, that they were being exploited. They offered to pay for me and the doctor, in addition to the grandchildren that Madiba chose to accompany us. What I always greatly appreciated about my boss was that he was very aware not to overplay someone's hospitality. So despite them paying for us, we didn't clean out the mini-bar or make international calls on the telephone, but rather dealt with the hospitality with the greatest respect.

I had now been working for Madiba for ten years and I had never seen him enjoying a holiday this much. He had private time with his wife and grandchildren and we all enjoyed meals like a big extended family. For the first time there was no rush. And it was difficult to get used to. Mum had to remind us constantly to relax and that we were on holiday. We watched performances by Mauritian dancers and it is one of the only two occasions that I remember Madiba dancing with Mum. He also jokingly insisted that we do the pata pata. 'Pata Pata' is a song by the legendary late South African singer Miriam Makeba, co-written by another legend, Dorothy Masuka. The song was released in 1957, before Madiba's imprisonment, and it reached the Billboard Hot 100 in 1967 in the US when Madiba was already imprisoned. The Xhosa song means 'touch-touch' and while singing it you are supposed to show how you 'touch-touch' your dancing partner. One of the bodyguards, Sydney Nkonoane, showed me how to dance the pata pata, much to Madiba's amusement. He was so fond of the song that I could well imagine him dancing to it back in the 1950s.

Security and I would exercise in the mornings while Mum did her walking, have a late breakfast and then swim and be in the sun for the rest of the day around Madiba. He would sit in the shade on the lawn overlooking the sea and wave at tourists walking by 'half naked' as he

described them – people in swimming costumes. He enjoyed having us all around all the time. We were so busy back at home that one hardly ever got time to really appreciate the time spent together and here we were looking forward to actually having meals together.

The only connection to home was of course the news clippings. Every morning, before he woke up, I had to ensure that staff at the office in Johannesburg selected news clippings from the papers and faxed them to us. He wasn't interested much in the international publications that one found at a resort of this nature but insisted on news from home. Well, and we couldn't wait for him to finish with the clippings so that we could all catch up on the news too. The suffering staff back at the Foundation offices had to be in the office at all hours to prepare the clippings to be sent to us wherever we were.

After a few days Madiba announced that he wanted to go into the water. We were hesitant as we were not sure whether he would be able to stand in the water. He was having difficulties walking and was using a walking stick. Security took him down the terrace to the water and he sat on a chair in the water allowing the waves to break over his feet. The pure joy on his face touched my heart in a way that is difficult to describe. How could something so ordinary, something we take for granted, bring such pleasure to a human being?

We then discovered that Madiba hadn't swum in the sea for over forty years. The last time he had been in the ocean was when he removed seaweed from the water while on Robben Island, but that was manual labour under the watchful eye of prison guards and in the cold Atlantic Ocean, and at the same time he slipped on the rocks and injured his knee for ever. This was so different. Mum helped him to experience the simple things again, like family meals, sunshine and appreciating the beauty of life in flowers, landscapes and music – things that just seemed to pass him by after his release.

Madiba was getting tired of his busy schedule and wanted to spend more time at Shambala, writing. He started saying that he wanted to 'retire' and I reminded him that he was retired. We discussed it with Prof. Gerwel and called a press conference to announce he was retiring from retirement. Madiba addressed a press conference on 1 June 2004 where he said: 'Don't call me, I'll call you.' Well, they never stopped calling. The public pressure continued for him to honour their events, to open their projects or intervene in any situation where people felt they had reached a dead-end. Everybody saw themselves as the exception, the one for whom Madiba should step out of

retirement. Madiba made everyone feel special and people therefore always felt that they had a special relationship with him. The same people who complained that he was too busy or was seen doing too much of this or that were then the ones for which he sometimes had to make the exception. You sometimes feel like going crazy in that environment. Many of the people who claimed they had special relationships with him did, but it is precisely this that made it difficult for him to retire until the age where he was simply no longer able to do anything physically.

The ANC came calling too. The next election was approaching and the ANC came to announce to Madiba that they were in financial difficulty. Big business was reluctant to be seen to support any one political party and so Madiba roped in former President F. W. de Klerk too. The two former enemies jointly set off on the streets to fundraise for both the New National Party (the former National Party) and the ANC. I had to make appointments for them with the CEOs and together they went cap in hand asking for financial assistance for the parties they had once led. Of course any company enjoyed having both Madiba and Mr de Klerk in their offices and the fundraising attempt was successful.

* * *

In March 2004 Charlize Theron became the first South African to be awarded an Oscar at the Academy Awards in Los Angeles, for her role in the movie Monster, and soon she was back to visit her country of origin. Madiba was in Maputo but he agreed to return to be in Johannesburg to meet with Ms Theron. The media was in a frenzy. We ordered koeksisters, an Afrikaner delicacy that Charlize mentioned she was hoping to eat while in South Africa. Madiba offered her koeksisters and although she took one, she never ate it. She announced her intention to start an AIDS charity but I wasn't sure how informed she was of the intricacies of the disease. They appeared in front of the media following their meeting and she told Madiba in the presence of the world media how much she loved him. Women always loved Madiba as he was charming and generous in paying compliments. A real charmer.

It couldn't have been pleasant for Mrs Machel to hear people declaring their undying love to Madiba and him charming them; however, she never complained. I recall an incident in the Presidency

at some stage when it became too much and all female staff kissed him whenever they greeted him. Female staff were then asked not to kiss the President in public. It was funny. Everyone just adored Madiba but it was becoming a liability for him to be seen being kissed by women every day wherever he moved.

About a year later we were looking for Charlize to ask her to record a message in support of Madiba's 46664 AIDS awareness campaign. First we struggled to get hold of her and when we eventually did, we were told by her publicist that she was busy filming and unable to record a twenty-second promo. I insisted that she could find five minutes to do this but I was told that it was not possible. We were offended because on the occasion she visited South Africa Madiba flew from another city to meet her in Johannesburg. Only when she heard about it personally did she intervene. Sometimes staff can cause considerable damage to your reputation and relationships, as we'd learned.

* * *

One of the ministers Madiba had appointed in his Cabinet, the Minister of Intelligence, Joe Nhlanhla, had had two strokes and was bedridden. Kgalema Motlanthe, the Secretary General of the ANC at the time, reported to Madiba that Joe was not well. We visited him in hospital and were told that he didn't have the financial means to be taken to a hospice. Madiba mobilized business to start a fund for Joe Nhlanhla and soon he was moved to a high-care centre. I was sad to hear of his death but I was saddened that the responsibility of these things kept coming back to Madiba, as if he was for ever expected to pay down on a refund for what people had done for him in the past. At times, the requests were relentless, and it seemed everybody wanted him to personally bail them out of whatever financial mess they found themselves in.

On 24 March 2004 we set out on another visit to Saudi Arabia. Sometimes it was for fundraising, sometimes just to honour a request from the Saudis. I now had my own abaya and was quite comfortable wearing it and moving around in Riyadh. After my previous experience, I knew I had to tone down my frustrations with the Saudis. I grew to enjoy our Saudi trips because I knew exactly what to expect, I knew what to do and not to do and was happy to follow their rules because I no longer had unrealistic expectations. I still had

difficulty communicating with some of the officials as they wouldn't take instructions easily from women, but while I was with Madiba they obliged.

We were scheduled to meet with the King and as usual I was told that I was not allowed to accompany Madiba as no women are ever allowed to meet the King. Madiba insisted and, surprisingly, the messenger returned to say that I would indeed be allowed to accompany him. The appointment time arrived and we set off to the King's palace. Upon arrival Madiba did what he usually did whenever he was scared that I would go astray. As soon as he exited from the car he stopped and asked, 'Where is my secretary?' The men would run around looking for the secretary and then rush me to him. I sometimes deliberately remained in the car for a few seconds longer because I knew I would not be able to fight my way through the security on my own and unless Madiba called me I would get stuck. As we entered the palace, surrounded by a mass of people, he took my hand. I was uncomfortable as I knew it was unheard of for me to be there and then, secondly, it was not proper for an unmarried woman to be seen to have any physical contact with a man. But he didn't let go of my hand and he knew the rules very well.

We were escorted to the waiting room where we sat until the King called for Madiba. Again Madiba took my hand and we entered the King's chambers. He greeted the King and left me standing behind him. I wanted to turn around and run, but I didn't. I just felt so uncomfortable. Madiba then turned around and said, 'Your Majesty, this is my secretary and granddaughter, Zelda la Grange.' I knew I was not supposed to make eye contact with the King either and I didn't. I bowed my head and smiled although I knew not to curtsy. Madiba was very intolerant of people being submissive in situations like these. But I was really scared. The only thing that went through my mind was: The King can see I'm not black; I can't be your granddaughter. The King extended his hand to shake my hand and I saw Madiba nodding his head in approval of me sticking my arm out. So I did. The King held my hand and I could feel sweat dripping down my back.

The King was visibly old but he seemed friendly. He was talking to us through a translator and welcomed me. I wanted him to let go of my hand but he didn't. He asked me how I was and Madiba interrupted and told him that just before I left Johannesburg on our way to Saudi I was involved in a smash and grab robbery incident in my car, where thugs stole my handbag from the front seat. I was

indeed very upset when we boarded the plane the previous night – my life was in the handbag that was stolen and for the first time I boarded a flight without even so much as a cellphone. However, right there I was more concerned about my defiance of the Saudi culture just being in the same room as the King. Madiba told him that I was still in shock and the King expressed his sympathy. He eventually let go of my hand and we were all seated to have tea with him. The King no longer often received visitors as he was old and ill. Nevertheless we had a brief chat to him before we departed. He was clearly very fond of Madiba and appreciated the courtesy call.

Madiba had also asked to meet with the Crown Prince and in the afternoon we set off to meet him. Clearly he was already ruling Saudi Arabia and he was more serious and pressurized for time. His office and environment were a bit more reformed and we had no trouble with my attendance. We had a few days to spare in Saudi and Madiba had an idea for us to visit Medina and Mecca, the place of pilgrimage where Muslims travel to annually to pay their respects. We had everything arranged when I was told that I was not going to be allowed to travel with Madiba as I was not Muslim. My response to the officials was, 'But Madiba is not Muslim either!' They were stunned. They thought he was Muslim. It never ceased to amaze me about Madiba – that he could associate and relate so well with people that they started believing he was 'one of them'.

We ended up going to neither Medina nor Mecca. From Saudi we were set to visit Tunis and then Iran. In Tunis Madiba was supposed to attend an African Infrastructure Fund board meeting and in Iran he was scheduled to receive the highest honour of that country from President Khatami. In Tunis Madiba was tired and he didn't attend the board meeting but only a short reception. Cyril Ramaphosa accompanied us and he explained that Madiba was tired and unable to attend the board meeting. It was the first time I saw him simply being tired and not wanting to do anything. For me it was a big crisis. I didn't know how we would explain that to people. Luckily Cyril did all the explaining and I didn't have to take the blame. I also called Prof. Gerwel and both he and Cyril spoke with one voice: 'If he doesn't want to do it, he shouldn't. He is entitled to be tired.' Then Madiba announced that he no longer wanted to go to Iran but he wanted to return home. He had never cancelled an international trip before nor had he simply not felt up to travelling. We informed the Iranian government and they were clearly very disappointed. He wanted to

spend time at home with his wife and not to have a life dictated by a schedule. I had expected these signs much sooner than they appeared, but gave him the freedom to decide when enough was eventually enough; however, it still came as a surprise.

* * *

When we were back in South Africa, Madiba decided that he had to send a gift to both the King and the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia to thank them for all their hospitality over the years. He asked me for suggestions. The Saudis are so rich this was a huge challenge. I suggested that we perhaps send them each two springbok and two oryx antelopes. I had done my research and knew they would survive in the Saudi environs. What kind of presents do you give to people who have everything their hearts desire? I learned that they both loved their animals and therefore the antelope would be a welcome gift. Madiba agreed.

We asked the farm manager at Shambala at the time, Dries Krog, to assist us. The animals had to go into quarantine before leaving and it took weeks to organize all the necessary paperwork and export permits. People often asked me over the years what exactly my job entailed. I didn't know where to start but would say, 'I can type, answer telephones, call press conferences and export springbok and oryx to Saudi Arabia.'

Back at home we attended another ANC rally prior to the elections but by now Madiba had lost the appetite to actively campaign. They would have ANC National Executive meetings during which people would voice their unhappiness about his alleged disrespect for the President. These people were never willing to confront Madiba directly and he had to hear of these discussions from other attendees.

South Africa was bidding for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Madiba was informed about the initiative but we saw our role being minor if anything because it was the role of the head of state to drive these initiatives. In late April 2004 Tokyo Sexwale, former premier of Gauteng Province and then running a multibillion-rand business empire, visited Madiba in his capacity as one of the members of the bid committee. Tokyo announced that they wanted Madiba to go to Trinidad and Tobago to help in the lobbying. Madiba was tired and he didn't feel like travelling. At first he said no. Tokyo didn't let go and two nights later we were on our way to Trinidad and Tobago. We

were unable, as his advisers, to maintain the consistency of implementing his decisions. The public was confused about who held the structure of power around him. I declined to accept that responsibility on many occasions, and as much as I tried to execute his wishes, the decision-making really depended on a lot of external influences as well as decisions by Madiba, Prof. and the CEO of the Foundation. Ultimately Madiba had to decide to do anything, and once he had agreed or been convinced it was difficult to persuade him otherwise; the same would apply to his refusal to do anything. He would just become stubborn.

I insisted that this visit be downscaled and that the programme be minimized. The reason for the visit was to convince members of FIFA who resided in Trinidad and the region to vote for South Africa's bid. We flew in a comfortable plane but Madiba was used to complete silence when he slept. The configuration of the plane was of such a nature that one had to walk past him while he was sleeping to get to the toilets. He didn't sleep well and that worried me. Tokyo tried his best to ensure everybody's comfort but when we landed I looked through the aeroplane window and saw that the government had put out a full guard of honour for Madiba's arrival, when we had asked them not to. It was not practical to expect Madiba to perform any ceremonial duties after such a long flight. When I noticed the guard of honour Tokyo and I had words and I asked him to step in. He himself could see that Madiba was tired so he called Jack Warner, the FIFA member in Trinidad who obviously wielded power in that country, on board the plane to meet us. We were told that the guard of honour was simply a receiving line and that Madiba would be free to depart from the airport immediately.

The entire visit was a battle. Merely two weeks after our visit to Trinidad we travelled to Zurich where South Africa was awarded the bid to host the 2010 World Cup tournament. I suppose it was worth it. After Zurich we went to Douw Steyn's estate in the countryside in England where we could take a breather for a few days.

* * *

I cannot recall what year it was but during one of our visits to London we paid a courtesy call to Prime Minister Tony Blair, as we did on many occasions. I loved going to 10 Downing Street, especially after it featured in the 2003 movie Love Actually. When Hugh Grant was

dancing as Prime Minister in one of the rooms in Downing Street I smiled, having been in that room myself before. Not dancing though. But on this particular occasion we hurriedly got ready for the appointment at Downing Street. Prime Minister Blair was always warm towards Madiba and we returned to the Dorchester Hotel where we stayed, satisfied with the meeting.

It was autumn and the sun rose later and set earlier. Added to that was the usual cloudiness outside. When I stepped out of the car upon our arrival back at the Dorchester I noticed that I was wearing two different shoes. You idiot, I thought. I was too ashamed of myself to point out my mistake to anyone, but later confided in the doctor with us and we laughed at my stupidity. I always stayed in a particular room in the Dorchester whenever I was there with Madiba, kindly arranged by a South African ex-pat, Nigel Badminton, who had become a close friend due to all our visits there. This room had a small dressing room, but it was more a corner than a room. There was no natural light and I had to rely on artificial light. I was in such a rush when we left, trying to gather everyone and to make sure Madiba was ready to leave, that I didn't notice that I had put on two different shoes. The two pairs I had were more or less the same style with similar heels and therefore I didn't feel the difference when I was walking. The one was black though and the other dark brown. It is to this day probably the most stupendously ignorant thing I've ever done. You try and reverse such an action a thousand times or try to remember if anyone in Downing Street might have noticed.

From London we set off to Spain where Madiba and Mrs Machel attended the wedding of the son of King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia of Spain. This was nothing short of a fairytale. Mostly royalty from other countries attended and hardly any other politicians were invited to all parts of the celebrations. We would tease Madiba about it and he would remind us that indeed he was born into royalty too. To us it may only be considered Xhosa royalty but still it was royalty and he loved being reminded that he was a prince.

On 24 May 2004 we received a visit by the renowned boxing promoter Don King. He was a controversial character but this was another occasion on which we were told that Madiba had to do it. Of course, being a boxer himself, Madiba didn't object. I was in my office when the receptionist called to say 'King is here'. I'd forgotten for a moment that we were expecting him and responded: 'The King of what?' We all laughed and indeed it was King, the King of boxing.

There were many of these moments that lightened the days and kept us sane in a way.

As expected, after a brief rest (and despite his retirement) Madiba decided that he wanted to attend the International AIDS Conference in Thailand. He was hoping to continue the fight even in retirement and to leave a strong message behind. This was shortly before his eighty-sixth birthday. On our way back from Thailand I wrote a piece for the Sunday Independent, a message for his birthday. On the Sunday of his birthday the article appeared on the front page reading: 'Khulu, my wish for your 86th birthday is time – Zelda'. I truly wished for him to have time for himself, time with his wife and time to reflect. But as soon as things became too quiet, he would initiate things again. Soon the retirement status changed to 'to allow him to choose to do what he wants' and off we went again. I sensed that it was a struggle within himself between staying at home and being isolated from the world. We came to the conclusion that he would just never stop and as soon as he sent out signs that he was available again, the usual suspects saw their way in to approaching him again.

I felt as though some of the family and their associates disapproved of my presence in his life. For some it seemed personal and for others it seemed to me as though they were uncomfortable with him depending on a white woman. I felt caught between my duty to Madiba and the perception that I was a public burden to him. If I tried to make myself scarce, he would call me and sometimes become irritated that I wasn't at my post. He was becoming more and more dependent on me for very simple reasons: he was old; he needed someone there when he entered a meeting because he needed to be reminded of what to expect or what was about to happen. His memory wasn't as good as it had been. I felt stressed and he saw it.

Madiba would sit me down and give me a lecture about the fact that I worked for him, that I had to do as he told me and that I shouldn't allow people to distract me. Thinking back now, I should have told a few people back then, when he was still able to defend me, that they had to voice their complaints directly to him, but I never wanted to burden him with my personal battles. I had to face the fact that a young white Afrikaner woman caring for him was always going to be an unlikely and unpopular situation. Yet I was determined to never abandon him for as long as he wanted me. He told me about such disgruntled visitors on a few occasions, explaining how they challenged him for appointing a white Afrikaner woman. The first

time he told me, he was cautious about the way in which he conveyed it, but after a few occasions both of us would laugh whenever he repeated it.

Xoliswa, Madiba's long-time chef, and I spoke a lot over the phone, as she was usually working whenever I had to be connected to Madiba on the telephone. We came to the conclusion that everybody wanted our jobs, but few people were prepared to put in the hours and effort.

* * *

Back in early 2003 I had noticed Madiba was disturbed about something. He spent days being reserved and withdrawn. Madiba told me that his only surviving son Makgatho had been to the house to tell him that he had AIDS. I was devastated by the news but I assured Madiba that I would do whatever to support him.

When Makgatho was admitted to hospital in December 2004 I went with Madiba to the hospital on the first afternoon. There we found Makgatho already in the High Care Unit. Madiba went inside and insisted that I walk with him. We only saw Makgatho occasionally and he really only became part of Madiba's life in later years. I was fond of him even though my dealings with him were limited. He was always very courteous and respectful in his dealings with me and helpful whenever I asked him to help with something around Madiba or attend an event on his father's behalf. I didn't know why children from his first marriage were absent from Madiba's life at that stage but I did see how Mrs Machel tried to bring the family together. She constantly tried to broker peace between the different parts of the family and insisted that all his children become part of his life. It wasn't easy for her because some of his children felt bitterness towards him. I was an employee and never interfered with the family matters, and never lost sight of the fact that I was an employee.

I was sad to see Makgatho in hospital. He couldn't talk but Madiba spoke to him, and just before we left I bent down and whispered to him: 'Hi Makgatho, this is Zelda. Remember, we love you very much and be strong.' I had seen a person with AIDS recovering before and I was hoping that he would too. Before we left Makgatho's sister Makaziwe entered. I was asking the nurse what Makgatho's temperature was so as to try and give Madiba some kind of comfort or something and Makaziwe told me: 'Leave my brother's medical

records alone. It's got nothing to do with you.' I was desperate to tell her I had known for two years that her brother had AIDS and I had never done anything to harm him or talk about his condition. I wasn't about to start; my asking was purely to try and hopefully give Madiba some comfort.

I was on holiday over December in Paternoster, a small coastal town on the west coast of South Africa, when Meme, Madiba's housekeeper, told me that it was better to return as things were turning for the worse. I knew we had to assist with support to the household if that was the case and so I cut my holiday short and returned home. While I was driving home, Makgatho passed away and I never saw him again after that one visit. I was never asked to stay away but you just know when your presence is not wanted. I informed Mrs Machel that I was back at home but I waited two days before I went to Madiba's house to pay my respects. When Mrs Machel asked why I hadn't come before I said that I was mindful of people hurting and mourning and that I didn't want to add to the burden or be an irritation to them. She was irritated with my assumptions but understood how I felt. Makgatho was the father of Mandla, Ndaba, Mbuso and Andile. I hurt for these children as they were part of our everyday life and I felt like I grew up with them. Those years they mostly treated me like a sister and we had a close bond.

I tried to stay away from the family as it mourned but I did try to help with logistics. It was a very sad funeral and my heart broke for Madiba. In African tradition the body is brought back home for a night vigil before the burial the next day. The person 'sleeps' in his/her bedroom for the last night and the next morning a prayer service is held in the foyer or entrance hall of the house where the body is displayed for the last time before the burial commences. Madiba insisted that I be there and take part in saying our last farewells. Mrs Machel was next to Madiba and held his hand in a tight grip throughout the ceremony. I had only once before seen someone who was dead, when my grandmother from my father's side passed away while I was still a child. That memory haunted me for many years. Makgatho looked peaceful though, being back home. It must have been one of the saddest times with Madiba, seeing him burying his son. Mrs Machel held his hand tightly throughout the proceedings.

* * *

In the early 2000s Madiba called on Douw Steyn and asked him to think of methods to generate an extra income. Madiba was receiving only a pension as former President but not nearly enough to maintain his residences and the needs of his extended family. I got a sense that he felt responsible for providing for everyone around him – his continuing desire to support people – and whenever someone needed something, they would turn to Madiba. Even during prison years, letters now published in the book Conversations With Myself point to the fact that Madiba was always the provider.

At the time Madiba's lawyer was Ismail Ayob, who used to handle all his finances. Madiba never handled any money himself and would simply request any of his lawyers to deal with financial matters on his behalf. Life had evolved while Madiba was imprisoned and he didn't know how to operate the technology around banking in the modern world.

Madiba had the ability to trust people unconditionally. I got to know of Ismail Ayob early in the Presidency and whenever Madiba needed something that cost money, Ismail would be called. Ismail took his responsibilities very seriously. He also dealt with all Madiba's intellectual property and the use of his image. Whenever someone promised Madiba money for whatever project they agreed upon, the money would need to be in the bank first before the door was opened for discussions. Madiba never handled such matters personally and, from my experience, half the time he didn't know what Ismail was negotiating on his behalf, but Ismail was tenacious when it came to dealing with Madiba's financial matters.

Whenever anyone wanted money, Madiba would send them to Ismail. But he would call Ismail first and instruct him how to handle the matter. On many occasions Ismail would question the expenditure intently. That irritated people and in my experience no one ended up having a good relationship with him. And sooner rather than later everybody said: 'Ismail must go.' But he didn't. Madiba was also a very loyal person so despite what others' opinions may have been Madiba was steadfast in his loyalty towards Ismail.

Another of Madiba's lawyers was George Bizos, who had been a lawyer for Madiba for decades, since before his imprisonment; he was even part of the team that represented him at the Rivonia Trial. He was someone who commanded authority as a result of his legal experience and knowledge. He was also one of the few people who shared a very special friendship with Madiba and someone of whom

Madiba was extremely fond.

Douw Steyn came back to Madiba after Madiba's request with an idea to generate some income to support his family. However the idea involved a commercialization of his image to some extent. The proposal was circulated to the lawyers, who were all vehemently opposed to it. It would create enormous difficulty in trying to stop illegitimate commercialization of his image in future, and therefore Douw's idea was declined. His intentions were nevertheless good. We had always been consistent in maintaining Madiba's wishes not to allow his image or name to ever be commercialized, something he tasked the Nelson Mandela Foundation with after his Presidency.

We were offered money over the years for many things but there were a few unwritten rules no one was ever going to compromise on, no matter what amount was put on the table.

There were just certain things Madiba was never willing to compromise on. Jeopardizing his relationship with the Queen was one, association with tobacco and alcohol another, and never selling his time. On one occasion a famous alcohol brand offered us US$2 million. They wanted nothing in return from Madiba, but alcohol and the association with Nelson Mandela as a humanitarian didn't fit and we declined. Once we were offered money from the South African Breweries as a donation and Ismail declined that too.

In Paris we were offered US$5 million from a well-known luxury brand for Madiba to do an advertisement for them. I liked the people but I knew that we could never commercialize his name. And so we never sold Madiba's time either. People wanted to pay to meet him, we declined and sometimes they met him but we refused to take the money nevertheless. To me the rationale was that if you didn't believe in the legacy of Nelson Mandela and only wanted to pay if you could benefit from the human himself, it meant that your intentions were not pure. We have indeed lost millions over the years but we succeeded in avoiding commercial exploitation or association with anything that didn't relate to the legacy of Nelson Mandela. Or at least we tried and mostly succeeded. That doesn't mean we liked people less who produced alcohol or people that made such advances. People are sometimes oblivious and it is in no way a reflection on their integrity. Most celebrities worldwide, and even world leaders, lend their images to advertising or contribute auction items by putting a lunch or dinner or a rare experience with them up for sale. It's a good way of making money, but not for someone with the moral

responsibilities of Nelson Mandela.

Here, though, it was for personal benefit, to support some of his extended family, and it was more complicated. Ismail came to Madiba a few days after the proposal from Douw was declined with a counter-proposal. Madiba would create artworks that were reproduced from drawings he was guided to do, sign them all and then they would be sold. As Madiba became older he kept reminding those around him that he had a large family to provide for, which indicated to us that there was urgency to the matter. He fundraised for an education trust as he was adamant that his grandchildren should all be well educated. There was nothing sinister about it; people understood that he'd been imprisoned for a long time and felt that he had to support his family somehow to compensate for his absence.

Ismail's proposal was accepted and soon he entered a deal with businessman Ross Calder on Madiba's behalf and they brought an artist to Madiba's house who helped him to colour in some drawings and do some charcoal sketches. The initiative was based on another project done by world icons who did similar amateur-like art and it ended up being very profitable for them. The first phase was completed and then reproduced and Madiba then started colouring and again those were reproduced. The next phase was for him to sign thousands of these prints. And so I was left with scheduling the signing sessions. Every few days Madiba would sit for an hour or two signing these sketches. Hundreds or perhaps even thousands of them. I don't know. As Madiba fully trusted Ismail I was not present at all these signing sessions. Sometimes they were done at home and sometimes they were done at the office. No one kept a record and there was no reason to question the conviction with which this project was being run. After all, as Madiba was always quick to point out, never question a person's integrity until you have valid reason to do so. Moreover, I found Ismail in Madiba's service back in 1994. I never questioned their relationship or Ismail's authority because they had a history, and as I so often got pointed out to me, I didn't.

In April 2005 an article appeared in the Noseweek, an investigative magazine, with the title CIVIL WAR IN MADIBALAND. The author wrote:

> In order to understand the civil war that is breaking out in Mandelaland, it is useful to imagine a medieval monarchy when the King is nearing the end. The family, and factions within the family, are agitating for position in the aftermath. The court is rampant

with whispers and plots.

At the centre of this 'civil war' was the issue of who controlled Madiba's future income and, more importantly, the licence that trademarked his name and image. Madiba wanted objective people such as his lawyers Bizos, Bally Chuene and Wim Trengove, not his family, in control of his estate. More so, he was disappointed at Ismail's conduct. Someone planted a seed within Madiba's mind that Ismail should report on progress, and when he started questioning Ismail and asking about the project, in my opinion the relationship started deteriorating. Madiba made a turn-around on his decision about the project. He instructed George Bizos and others to halt the project. Papers were served on Ismail and Calder's company and an order was obtained to stop the sale of the artworks. This caused anger among those who profited from the project and war ensued.

In the latest legal battle in 2013, two of Madiba's daughters – Makaziwe and Zenani – and Ismail served papers on Bally Chuene, arguing that his appointment and those of Advocate George Bizos and Tokyo Sexwale to the trust controlling the proceeds from the artworks were not legitimate. The case was withdrawn in September 2013.

* * *

We were often, now, at Shambala. Shambala not only created the perfect setting for him to write but also much needed peace and quiet time. Madiba often said that he missed prison. I was troubled and surprised by this. He then went on to explain that in prison he had time to read and time to think and I comprehended what he meant. He would insist on going to Shambala for weeks at a time as he was eager to complete his memoirs. It was a long and tedious task. He would write every page in longhand, finish about five pages for me to type and once I'd typed them he would make factual corrections. Then, instead of giving me the typed page with his corrections on to execute the corrections, he would insist on rewriting the entire page in longhand. I suggested sitting with him with my laptop to type as he spoke. He refused. He didn't like technology and he wanted to be able to put pen on paper. I even suggested that he simply spoke into a recorder and I could type from there, but to that he also said: 'No, you know, I wouldn't like that.' We also appointed a researcher but Madiba was simply not up to writing.

Extracts from the manuscript are published in Conversations With

Myself and hopefully soon the unpublished parts will be used in a sequel to Long Walk to Freedom, this time dealing with his Presidential years only.

The reality of the matter was that we were slowly but surely putting on the brakes. Even so, in May 2005 Madiba went on his last visit to the United States. Our first stop was in New York. There a fundraiser was organized by the former chairman of Goldman Sachs and Madiba was scheduled to attend a dinner. Mrs Machel couldn't join us in New York and Madiba was grumpy as he was becoming uncomfortable when she was not around. Madiba took his usual nap on the afternoon of the event and when I went to wake him to get ready for the dinner he announced that he was not feeling well. My heart came to a standstill. We called the doctor. The doctor couldn't find any sign of serious illness and it was probably pure exhaustion. We agreed that we would bring the main donors to the room for him to greet but that he didn't have to go to the dinner. We were all nervous at people's reactions when he decided to cancel something.

The sponsors were very understanding though, and I wish all people were so accommodating. The next day Madiba was fighting fit. He got up for his meeting with President Clinton and was happy to see him as usual. It was also a day closer to Mrs Machel joining us and that always cheered him up. Two nights later we went to a dinner hosted by Sol Kerzner and Robert De Niro and organized by Jerry Inzerillo in Tribeca. It was a lovely dinner attended by a lot of good friends but also celebrities from the music and entertainment industry – half of whom I didn't know myself. They swamped his table to greet him and we had to be firm to keep people away from the table; I had to 'instruct' Madiba to focus on eating his food to keep up his stamina. Madiba didn't have the faintest idea who many of the celebrities were. Some of the names and faces he recognized from reading about them in newspapers but most of them were strangers to him. I think this may have been quite a shock to them as he didn't always react when meeting some of them for the first time as their fans usually did. It was entertainment in itself to watch. They were flocking his table. When we walked out one of the gentlemen we stopped to greet was Richard Gere. I looked at Madiba as he was introduced to him and wondered whether he knew how many women across the world would literally do anything to be in his shoes at that moment. He was completely oblivious, but as he introduced me I think he could see that I was dumbstruck.

It reminded me of another occasion when we travelled to Ireland in support of the Special Olympics. As we were about to enter an elevator I saw a man rushing around the corner to try and catch it too. He wasn't aware who was inside. When I looked a second time, it was Pierce Brosnan. I whispered to Madiba, 'The man about to enter the lift is a famous actor. He plays 007 in the James Bond movies.' I should have stopped just after 'famous actor' but was overtaken by surprise myself that he moved without any entourage. And of course as he entered the lift Madiba was still asking, 'He plays who?' I didn't respond and instead said, 'Khulu, you remember the famous actor Pierce Brosnan?' And Madiba said, 'Oh yes, of course, pleased to meet you.' I was relieved when the elevator stopped on our floor and we could get out. Mr Brosnan eloquently greeted us.

A similar incident happened when Brad Pitt visited South Africa in support of the Mineseeker project, an initiative started by Richard Branson to fund the detection and destruction of landmines in previously war-stricken areas. Nelson Mandela's life revolved around politics, not entertainment, and apart from the few movies they were shown in prison he literally didn't have time to visit the cinema and there was nothing relaxed about his life that would allow him to for instance watch a DVD. He ate, slept and lived for politics and his humanitarian efforts. I tried to explain to Madiba who Brad Pitt was but it was difficult. When they finally met the next day Madiba asked (as he usually did) whether Brad had a business card with him. Of course Brad didn't. Madiba asked: 'So what do you do?' I luckily had explained to Brad that he had to understand that Madiba was not aware of developments in Hollywood and the film industry in general. And Brad was every bit gracious in his response and said: 'I try acting for a living.' I added, 'And he is very modest because he is one of the best actors in the world.' Brad didn't make a fuss nor was he surprised or embarrassed in any way. He was a true gentleman.

The night before his visit I got called by a mutual friend who was with the Mineseeker project. He said that Brad wanted me to join them for dinner. At first I declined. I told a colleague of mine and she enquired after my 'sanity' and asked who on earth declines to have dinner with Brad Pitt? Well I do. Although I appreciated the fact that the dinner was meant to give him an overview of South Africa and what to expect when meeting Madiba, I had had enough of dinners and evenings out talking about my boss. As much as I loved Madiba, I didn't want to feel that I had to entertain people with him. I had to

reconsider this invitation though, and I was happy I did. Brad was an exceptionally pleasant, humble person and we shared a love for motorbikes; we even discovered that we drove the same motorbike at the time. He wasn't only interested in hearing about Madiba but in really interacting with people who could give him a sense of South Africa and its future.

* * *

Our American trip continued after the New York party. This time President George W. Bush did return our call and Madiba went to Washington to meet him. For the first time, we stayed in Georgetown at the Four Seasons and the hotel used the pseudonym Mr and Mrs Smith for Madiba and Mrs Machel. I thought that was quite ironic. In South Africa the Smith surname is considered a white surname; it was shortly after the release of the movie Mr and Mrs Smith about a spy duo who fall in love, played by Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt. There were always these moments that provided much humour to the most stressful situations. Having my sense of humour also helped because I could quietly laugh at things to keep me sane.

While in DC, Madiba addressed the Congressional Black Caucus. We couldn't greet any of the attendees as it was a huge group of people and we were mindful of pleasing some and offending others. Back at the hotel after Madiba's address to the Black Caucus, I heard that Barack Obama, who was a senator at the time, hadn't attended the caucus as he didn't agree with their views on a specific issue. There was also a request from Senator Hillary Clinton to see Madiba and due to our relationship with the Clintons over the years, and knowing that it was more a social call than politics or business, we agreed, despite the fact that Madiba was exhausted by now after a busy programme in New York. The long-distance travel was just too much for him this time too. He still had to visit President Bush and we had to save any reserve energy he had. We also got a message that Senator Obama wanted to have an opportunity to greet Madiba. John Samuel, our CEO at the time, Prof. Gerwel and I unanimously said no to that request. Madiba was just too tired.

We were told by a long-time American friend of Madiba's, Frank Ferrari, that it would be just a handshake and that Senator Obama could be the first black American President in future, and quietly I thought: Ye right. We eventually agreed to the meeting in which they

greeted and exchanged pleasantries. He was overly respectful to the elderly Madiba and it also struck me how he paid attention to everyone, from the door man to the 'secretary'. Something very similar to the character of Nelson Mandela. The small people mattered, which speaks of the greatness of any man. Madiba didn't even get out of his chair to greet him as he was simply too tired. I cannot recall who took the picture of Madiba and the Senator but a picture showing Madiba seated was taken with only Senator Obama's silhouette showing as he bent to shake hands with Madiba.

This was the first time we would see President Bush after Madiba had pronounced that America was wrong to invade Iraq and that Prime Minister Tony Blair was merely acting as a Minister of Foreign Affairs for America. Ouch! He also said that President Bush didn't respect the wishes of the UN because Kofi Annan was black. Double ouch!! Madiba had a number of issues to discuss with President Bush and the plan was that they would appear jointly in front of the media following their meeting to show their 'agreement to disagree' to the rest of the world but that they were friendly again after all that had happened. Madiba often said that one should never be scared to hide your differences but that you should always remember that they are differences and that it doesn't determine the rest of any relationship. In the same way he had differences in opinion with Gaddafi but never snubbed him as a result of those differences.

I was worried Madiba was too tired and just too fragile for a meeting of this nature. So I made a note for him with pointers for the discussion. We entered the White House as we had done before and proceeded to the Oval Office. In the waiting room we were met by an intern who tried to make silly small talk with Madiba. My face usually shows my emotions and he quickly got the message. The President was available immediately and the meeting started. I appreciated their punctuality. At first I thought that he was friendly but when Madiba repeated himself the third time I could see that President Bush was getting impatient. Madiba didn't stick to the pointers and dwelled on conversation and then when he returned to the pointers he would repeat something he had already said. I was getting nervous as I could see President Bush had little understanding of the limitations of his old age. Before Madiba could finish, President Bush said, 'Well Mr President' – meaning Madiba – 'it's time for us to go and see the media.' Madiba wouldn't stop as he was not finished. The President interrupted him and repeated his request. I was disturbed.

To me it appeared as if President Bush was more interested in appearing in front of the media than in listening to what Madiba was trying to say. To his credit President Bush agreed to increase aid to Africa, but that didn't change my mind about my experiences that day. I felt disempowered and I felt sorry for Madiba as I couldn't do anything to support him more in those circumstances. But he carried himself with pride, even realizing himself that he was starting to be forgetful and that his mind often wandered. He would often say, 'you know I am almost one hundred years now, I forget things', and my heart would go out to him, sometimes just squeezing his hand or touching his shoulder to try and show him some comfort, that we understood and that we were there to support him even as he became forgetful.

* * *

I lived on the West Rand in Johannesburg at the time, about 21 kilometres from Houghton where our office and Madiba's residence was. In normal traffic it took me about forty minutes to get to Houghton or back. In peak-hour traffic it took me about two hours. It was killing me. In addition Madiba would call me for anything. On a Saturday morning while I was working in the garden Madiba would call and ask: 'Zeldina, are you busy?' Of course I would never say I was busy and would ask, 'How can I help Khulu?' He would then convince me that it was not something he could discuss over the telephone and could I come over to his house. So I cleaned up, dressed up and went to his house in Houghton. When I got there, nine out of ten times he couldn't remember why he had called me.

I tried to get him to write down whatever was on his mind at the time so he could remember when I got there, but he wouldn't do that. Then I tried to convince him to tell one of the household staff what it was about so I could remind him when I got there, but he wouldn't do that either. I had to make another plan. I had to start looking for a new home closer to him. I had bought my first motorbike at the time and my father convinced me to grow up, sell my toys and invest in property. So I bought a house much closer to the office and Madiba's residence.

But really I simply could no longer maintain the pace at which we were working and travelling in addition to taking care of 'Zelda'. The administration was overwhelming and being every day absent from

the office, attending events with Madiba, created an administrative backlog for me. Happily the Foundation's CEO approved the appointment of three assistants to help me. They were angels sent from heaven. The extra hands helped and I managed to delegate some of the duties so that I could find head space to strategize about everything around Madiba, from media communication to time management. But nothing ever happened according to plan. Madiba wanted to know from me what was expected of him every second of the day. And yet no matter how much I planned and paid attention to detail it was never flawless. I am told I am a slave driver myself and not an easy person to work with. I am a perfectionist and my expectations from others are sometimes too high. As Madiba got older I became more pedantic about detail around him, but at the same time strangely I grew more patient with others.

And sometimes Madiba was difficult. If I didn't pay him enough attention or didn't attend enough events to his liking, he would find a reason why I should do something myself and not delegate it. And then I would be caught up between the staff, trying to spare their feelings and protecting them from feeling that they were being shunned. I was no longer the shy scared white girl and he was very used to my obsessive-compulsive behaviour and perfectionist ways. They suited him. He would tolerate a lot of tardiness from other people but not from me.

* * *

In October 2005 we set off to Kenya for two weeks to spend time with Mrs Machel as she was working on the African Peer Review Mechanism in Nairobi. It was probably the longest two weeks of my life. At home I had a friend packing up my house and in Kenya all I wanted to do was go home. Madiba was talking less but even so he had never been the kind of person who can be unoccupied for long periods of time. He was frustrated too but it was a catch-22 situation. He wanted to be with his wife but he didn't want to be stuck in one place.

We first stayed in a hotel in Nairobi, beautifully surrounded by lush green trees but these blocked the sunlight coming into his room. As Madiba could not freely move around without being overwhelmed by people, we stayed indoors most of the time. After a few days, we decided to move to a golf estate where at least we had some sunlight

and he could sit outside. There was, however, little else to do apart from reading the news clippings from home and receiving a few visitors. Across from the room where Madiba stayed was a lake, surrounded by trees and bushes. My imagination runs wild when there is nothing to do and I imagined that the lake looked like Loch Ness. It was quite an eerie and strange lake. I told Madiba that I thought it was Loch Ness and told him about the Scottish myth about the monster in the lake. A few days later I referred to the lake as Loch Ness when Mrs Machel was home for lunch, and she told me to stop as I was scaring Madiba. Me? Scaring Madiba? We laughed.

With the help of my friend I moved home as soon as I got back to South Africa. I then decided that it was time for some normality and since I've always been a dog person, I decided to get two Boston terrier puppies. They were called Winston and Roxy. I had decided much earlier that I would never have dogs with mediocre names. They had to represent famous political figures. Winston looked every bit like Winston Churchill and only needed the cigar to be picture perfect. Roxy was a powder-puff girl and had no resemblance to any political characters. In hindsight I could have called her Christina after Christina Onassis or Madeleine after Madeleine Albright rather than Roxy, but Roxy suited her too. Soon they were my children and since Madiba was no longer eager to travel it was easier for me to give my pets the attention they needed.

Madiba spent even more time in Maputo but gave up on his writing. At home he still wanted to meet with interesting people and after the South African Idols competition he would read about it in the newspaper and announce that he wanted to meet the youngsters, and we would arrange it. Then a policeman got shot eleven times while on duty and miraculously survived. Madiba read about it in the paper and he wanted to see him. Some days he would say that he wanted to meet people and when they arrived he simply wasn't up to interacting with strangers. It became more difficult to predict what he wanted and it was clear that more patience and understanding was what was required from us. It is a natural process, part of ageing. You change your mind more frequently as the years progress and we get older.

* * *

From this time, everything started to calm down. Madiba was in Maputo with his wife most of the time and would only come to South

Africa when he had important engagements to attend. Mrs Machel had to continue with her work. Being the dynamic person that she is, she had to keep her work going and we spent most of the time at home and subsequently became bored. In my personal opinion, one of the characteristics that Madiba found attractive in Mrs Machel was the fact that she was dynamic and passionate; that she had the determination and commitment to bring about change not only in Mozambique but also across Africa and in effect to change the world. She was ambitious and while he wanted to spend time with her, he never expected her to give up what and who she was. She had a passion for children and improving the lives of her own people in Mozambique. She received the Nansen Medal from the UN in 1995 in recognition of her work with refugee children and she was determined to continue pursuing that agenda, to be a voice for the voiceless, something Madiba appreciated and admired and often boasted about when she was not around.

In January 2006 we set off to Mauritius again at the invitation of Sol Kerzner. This time we made sure that Madiba's schedule was clear and he could stay for ten days as opposed to one week. It was as enjoyable as the first time. As usual, Jerry Inzerillo from Kerzner International made sure that all our needs were taken care of as requested by Sol Kerzner. The same manager, Mauro Governato, was in charge of the property and he left no stone unturned to make sure Madiba had the time of his life. We enjoyed complete privacy and he returned to South Africa rejuvenated and ready for another year.

I met a young Mauritian trainer in the gym, Prakash Ramsurrun, who claimed that he was a trained biokineticist and when he asked about Madiba visiting the gym I told him that Madiba could no longer walk freely without assistance or his walking stick. Prakash challenged me and said that if he could do some stretching exercises with Madiba he guaranteed me that with some resistance training he would be able to walk again. I was usually very irritated when people made suggestions like these. Madiba had medical doctors around him at all times. In my own frustration I thought people underestimated our care for him. Didn't they think that we had looked into things already by the time they approached us? The doctors didn't want to listen to these suggestions, so I had to. And I had to invent the excuses why it wouldn't work or wouldn't happen.

I discussed Prakash's suggestion back at the villa with Madiba and Mum and they agreed that he could come round to show some

stretching exercises. The next morning Prakash started with his training. Of course, he had to do the stretching on me first for Madiba to approve of what would happen to him next; I was the guinea pig. Before we knew it Madiba took to the programme and he was co-operating with Prakash. Upon our departure Madiba was walking, unassisted, without his walking stick. He looked radiant and I wrote a note to thank Sol for the hospitality afterwards, stating that his generosity 'added years to Madiba's life' because I really believed it did. We brought Prakash to South Africa to train our masseuse but it needed determination and tenacity to keep Madiba going – not something Madiba was always open to. So a few months later, he was back on the walking stick.

* * *

Returning home Madiba spent more time in his lounge, and one day announced that it was time to get rid of some colonial art that was hanging there. Mrs Machel asked me to source African art and I had bought some similar art the previous year for my new house of individual Xhosa women. I went back to the shop and asked for the owner to come and show some African art to Madiba. At first he was happy with a painting depicting three Xhosa women. It was colourful and bright, and then two weeks later he decided that he was not happy with it and said: 'No, you see, this cannot be correct. This painting only shows women, there has to be a man too.' A man had to be added. The painting was returned to the artist, who added a Xhosa man to the image. I realized that Madiba's mind was programmed to be completely representative and balanced in any and every way. It was no longer a conscious decision but part of the fibre of the person and a response that came naturally. There had to be space for everyone and everything had to be perfectly balanced.

When you witness this every day, you become a little like that yourself. Your entire being changes being around someone like Madiba. Indeed as they say, be kind to every person you meet because we don't know their battles. I've learned to appreciate strangers more, to thank a person properly and to try and be respectful, always keeping in mind that the way you approach a person will determine how that person treats you – one of the great lessons from Madiba. Through watching him over the years I've come to realize the truth in the saying 'people will forget what you said, but they will never forget

how you made them feel.' And even just greeting someone in a friendly and respectful manner has shown me the truth around this.

* * *

President Clinton visited South Africa regularly. In 2007 he agreed to participate in a fundraiser which would benefit the Foundation. This was one of those occasions on which I called on some of the friends of ours to support a fundraiser like this. And they did. President Clinton donated some memorabilia to be auctioned and so did the Foundation. We raised a whopping R18 million (US$1.7 million) in one night only, with less than a hundred people in attendance. Unprecedented in South Africa. The money was added to the endowment fund for the Foundation to ensure its sustainability.

Sadly, to date the Nelson Mandela Foundation is the only one of the three Mandela charities that has not been able to reach its endowment. We often had to share proceeds with the other charities whose area of focus, children and scholarships, are things that easily attract goodwill. I was never paid an extra salary for fundraising. It was never part of my job description to arrange events or fundraisers, but it was what I expected of myself. I so believed in the necessity for us to preserve Madiba's legacy, for people and generations to come to be able to learn from the man, even after he was gone, that I wanted to leave no stone unturned to make sure everything was a success. Yet it is sad that I then got asked by some of his family: 'Why does a secretary get to do this and that . . . ?' I am unable to answer them and guess the best answer is, because no one else did it. I remain eternally grateful to people who answered my calls, who supported when I asked them, and for the friendships and relationships built over the years.

During a visit of President Clinton to the Foundation the day before the fundraiser he made a very moving speech in which he said about Madiba:

> I regret very much, more than I can say, but I was never in a position like Robert Kennedy to speak out against or do anything to help my friend [Madiba] when he was suffering all those long years. But he did live, and I believe God ordained it for a reason, and now in the grace and beauty of his later years, he doesn't even have to say anything for us to know that you look better, you feel better and you live better if you think our common humanity is more

important than our interesting differences.

It was moving and touching in every possible way and to me one of the best speeches President Clinton had ever made in our presence.

* * *

We also started to befriend Gordon Brown and his staff. We knew him as a British politician but he was very passionate about Africa as Chancellor in the UK and worked hard at pushing governments as best he could to meet the Millennium Goals. He was preparing to take over from Prime Minister Tony Blair, who was suffering politically as a result of the UK's involvement in Iraq. Gordon was a very humble person and Madiba was fond of him. The ANC was an ally of the British Labour Party but not as long as it supported violence or war. Gordon had ideals to withdraw from Iraq, but in the same way President Obama inherited a very complicated situation from President Bush, Gordon inherited equal challenges from Tony Blair. Tony was charming and I was close to his office staff too, but it was as if the private and public persona didn't marry: in private talks I liked him and his ideas but politically when in public he pronounced decisions that contradicted that person. Gordon epitomized a generous giant to me. He also visited Mozambique where he launched an education project with Madiba and Mrs Machel.

A few years later, Shaun Johnson, the Chief Executive of the Mandela Rhodes Foundation, wanted Madiba to meet with David Cameron on one of our visits to London. He was the leader of the opposition Tory Party in Britain at the time. Shaun also said that David could be the next Prime Minister. This time I knew not to say out loud even though I thought: Ye right, as if in my lifetime a Conservative will become the Prime Minister in Britain again – similar to my reaction when I was told that Barack Obama could become the first black President in the United States. But both did, and so I'm glad we agreed to meet with David Cameron at the time too.

Still, Madiba sent conflicting messages to us all about his 'retired' status. One example was the launch of the Elders, a global group of leaders and opinion makers who jointly speak out on matters relating to peace and human rights. The idea had come about in the early 2000s during a lunch at entrepreneur Richard Branson's home in London. The musician Peter Gabriel and Richard Branson suggested the idea, an organization of elderly statespeople to give guidance in

terms of the world's ongoing struggle to find justice and peace. Although a brilliant initiative Madiba was already too old and tired to participate in something like this actively but he was adamant that he wanted to support it. It was agreed from the start that he would launch it and then resign immediately as a result of his retirement. In principle he gave his consent that the initiative be launched with his support, taking in mind that the formation of the entity would provide much-needed advice on issues globally from an independent group of influential and respected people.

The more things changed, the more they stayed the same. At times Madiba would be at home for a few days and then announce that he wanted to go to a shop to buy a pen. I would then offer to go and buy the pen as I knew exactly which pens he preferred writing with – normal Bic plastic ballpoint pens. When I offered to go and buy the pen, he would resist and say that I would buy the wrong pen, and I would know that he simply wanted to be among people and it was the perfect excuse to have to go to a shopping mall. It was the security men's and my worst nightmare. We had great difficulty trying to get him in and out of shopping malls and one couldn't trick him by taking him to a stationery shop with an entrance from the street. It had to be a shopping mall. He would return with his simple pens.

On one occasion he went to Sandton City, a big shopping mall on the outskirts of Johannesburg. He was determined to buy a pen and the security detail took him to the Mont Blanc store, somehow not knowing that a Bic pen would have been totally adequate. I wasn't with him at the time. He selected the pen and when he was about to pay he realized that he didn't have any money on him and that none of the security had the amount, even if they added up all the cash they had together, to pay for the pen. Of course not. The police in South Africa are some of the lowest paid people in our country, yet they are expected to 'protect and serve'.

Nevertheless, Madiba never really carried money with him and only occasionally he would ask for cash from whomever, but then he would forget when he had given it out to grandchildren and as a result his wallet was always empty. The only permanent fixture in his wallet was a business card of Mrs Machel inside. It was sweet. I then got a frantic call from the security saying that Madiba said I should please pay for the pen. I asked to speak to the shop owner to make arrangements but the gentleman then said he would call me back later and send me an invoice.

Montblanc belongs to the Rupert family. They have been friends with Madiba for many years, first the father, Dr Anton Rupert, and later the son, Johann Rupert, who now runs the dynasty of some of the most successful luxury brands in the world, such as Cartier, Montblanc, Van Cleef & Arpels, etc. There was no way Madiba would have remembered or known that Montblanc belongs to the Ruperts and it was an honest intention by the security to find him a good pen when they took him there, thinking that he would have the money on him to pay for it. Of course Johann was not going to allow Madiba to pay for the pen and the word came back that the pen was a present. Madiba didn't want to accept it but eventually he had no choice and Johann won the battle. Until he got ill Madiba wore the pen in his pocket, referring to it as a Presidential Pen. It was a fountain pen that regularly had to be refilled with ink and it usually didn't have ink in so we tried to avoid using the pen purely because it would start a process of finding ink and refilling it, and then it would not write immediately and so whatever had to be signed was usually a mess.

Madiba had very few personal things that he was religiously holy about. His two pens, his wristwatch, his empty wallet, his ivory walking stick and the holder for his reading glasses, as well as his hearing aids. The most important, of course, was his wedding ring which he wore without fail whether he was indoors or outdoors, working or resting. These items had to be neatly placed beside his bed every night and they were the first items he looked for when he woke up. Whenever we flew overseas in commercial planes, he would give his wallet to me to keep until we arrived. He thought it was safer with me than with him. Yet I was usually just a few seats away from him, not any safer or unsafer than he was. And then it was always empty. On one occasion the household packed something in his suitcase as opposed to his hand luggage and he insisted on having it with him during the flight. It took some convincing for the captain of the aircraft to allow me and security to go down into the hold to look for our luggage to search for the item, as he would not rest without it. He was meticulous about certain things and these were some of them.

The other thing that was considered holy was his newspapers. One was not allowed to read his papers before he got to read them. He didn't like newspapers that had been opened. You had to remove the advertisement brochures inside without opening the papers. He would point-blank refuse to take a newspaper that had been opened before. And no matter what one did, you could never offer to refold them

when he had finished reading them. He insisted on doing it himself, whether the Queen or the Lord was waiting for him. He took his time in folding newspapers and knee blankets with the greatest precision. I came to the conclusion that these were the proof of a person living in isolation for twenty-seven years and there was no reason or need for us to try and change that. Clearly he had time to be as meticulous but then it becomes so entrenched that it becomes part of one's daily life. I often removed his shoes for him and then helped him to put his feet on a footrest. And woe betide me if the shoes were not put neatly next to him where he could see them. Don't think you could hide them under a chair or put them down loosely. You would soon be called back and asked to correct them. It was part of the disciplined person he was. 'Zeldina, just come and correct this,' he would say, calling me back to put down the shoes where he could see them, precisely next to each other facing the same direction.

On many occasions Madiba would announce that he wanted to go to a bookshop. He had more books than many libraries owned and I would then try my luck by asking what he was looking for, as I could go and buy it for him to avoid us being overwhelmed in public. He would then either say he wanted to go and look for a specific book, and I knew not to ask for the title, or he would be completely honest and say he just wanted to go and look at books. But he meant he wanted to see people too. Soon the bookstore would be in complete disarray. People didn't know why they originally wanted to come to the bookstore themselves, while I was trying to get him to focus on titles and sections in the store so we could leave as soon as possible. People overwhelmed him completely and we often feared that people would eventually kill him out of kindness.

He would sometimes page through a book and if the print was too small, even though the book was interesting, he would leave it behind. On more than one occasion did we ask Naspers, one of the biggest publishing holding companies in South Africa, to reprint a book for him in a bigger font. They were only too happy to oblige. And of course Madiba always left with a few books he got for free, but he usually insisted on paying and being treated like a normal paying customer or he would threaten the managers to never return if he was not allowed to pay. Other people would just accept anything for free, wherever they could get it from. Not Nelson Mandela. He insisted on paying and only occasionally accepted freebies. Sometimes he would buy one book and sometimes we would leave with boxes of books.

Many of them I'm sure never got read to a second page.

He loved South African authors and biographies. One of his favourite books was a poetry book by an Afrikaans poet, C. Louis Leipoldt (1880–1947). He subsequently visited Leipoldt's grave in the Western Cape in 1999 as he always loved his writings. And on some occasions he bought a book by Antjie Krog, the famous South African writer who wrote Country of My Skull, and I tried to reassure him he already had two copies at home, which I knew he did, but he insisted and it was pointless arguing. He even got angry at me once when I said we already had the book, so we bought the fourth or fifth copy at the time.

He would also announce sometimes that he needed a dictionary. After we bought a few dictionaries on different occasions I realized that one of the most stupid things I could do was to tell him that we had already bought a dictionary, just a few weeks ago. The dictionary was only an excuse to go to a bookstore and I think I may have bought twenty big print Oxford dictionaries with him. Even in foreign countries he would sometimes announce that he needed a dictionary, and we would set off to find the closest bookstore to our hotel, buy the dictionary and bring it home without a page being turned in it ever. He just couldn't say 'I want to be among people' or 'I want to see the city'. I think he thought it would appear vain if he did that so he'd rather settle for using a bookstore or needing a pen as a good excuse. It is one of the disadvantages of being such a famous person. He could never do things we just take for granted but only once that freedom is removed from you do you know what it is to appreciate it.

Strangely the Afrikaans section in bookstores always attracted him. He refers to his love for the writings of the Afrikaans writer Langenhoven in Conversations With Myself :

> Well, firstly he wrote very simply. And secondly, he was a very humorous writer, and of course part of his writing was to free the Afrikaner from the desire to imitate the English. His idea was to instil national pride amongst the Afrikaners and so I liked him very much.

I clung on to these words, trying to instil pride among the young Afrikaners for who and what they are. It was important to him that one remains an individual and embrace your history and ancestry and I often recited these words when I found myself in conversations with young Afrikaners.

We also went to a bookshop in Pretoria once, in the area close to the University of Pretoria right in the middle of the student area. We were on our way from his grandson's graduation ceremony when the convoy came to a complete standstill. I jumped out of my car (as I usually drove along in my own car) to ask the security why they were stopping. The answer was simple. We are going into the bookstore. We paged through a few books and then he stopped at the shelf where material on foreign languages was displayed. You could buy tapes and books to help you to learn a different language at the time. And so we bought the set to learn Portuguese. As Madiba spent a lot of time in Mozambique he wanted to learn the language and he wanted to understand what Portuguese was spoken whenever he was in Maputo. He made me promise not to tell Mrs Machel that he was going to try and learn Portuguese as he wanted to surprise her by learning her language, a very romantic gesture. I don't think the packet ever got opened and I don't know what happened to the DIY kit but we only managed 'morning', 'thank you' and 'please' in Portuguese.

* * *

On 14 November 2006 Madiba was heading to the Saxon Hotel where he was meeting Morgan Freeman for lunch. We drove in the convoy as usual and I drove my car at the back following the convoy, as I usually did. We were late. I always had a battle to get people away from Madiba in order for him not to be late for anything as I knew how much importance he paid to punctuality. This was one of those events and we were nervously trying to get out of the traffic to still have him arrive in time for lunch. It was blue lights and sirens everywhere trying to get through the stationary traffic.

At a traffic intersection where we had to turn right (keeping in mind that we drive on the left side of the road in South Africa) we were entering a crossing at the traffic light and the police closed the intersection as usual by blocking off traffic with one of their vehicles to allow the main car and back up to smoothly enter and exit the crossing, even though the traffic light may be red for oncoming traffic. So they did exactly that and we started entering the crossing. A gentleman in a sports car came speeding down the road with earphones in his ears and obviously did not hear the sirens or notice what was happening in front of him. He drove full speed right into the security car that was blocking the intersection. Everything seemed to

happen in slow motion. I could see the X5 BMW lifting into the air from the impact. The convoy stopped for a few seconds and it was really the first time I saw the Presidential Protection Unit in full operation. They were exceptionally good.

The security guards in the car that was hit by the sports car got out, grabbed their firearms and bundled into other cars, including mine, for us to get Madiba away from the scene as quickly as possible. We left the damaged car and two of the bodyguards behind and proceeded straight to the hotel. Madiba was looking in another direction at the time of the accident and he didn't hear the impact as his car is heavily armoured and therefore soundproof to some extent. The security dropped Madiba at the hotel and then rushed back to help their colleagues. I called a friend whose office was right across from the scene of the accident. She sent some of her staff outside to help our guys. Madiba had lunch with Morgan as if nothing happened. Lori, Morgan's business partner, who was with him, said we all looked visibly shocked when we arrived except for Madiba. This was reasonably typical of life with Madiba. Very little affected him because wherever he was layers and layers of protection absorbed the pressure of everyday life around him.

* * *

It was the year that the movie Last King of Scotland appeared on the movie circuit and, running out of ideas how to keep him occupied without him having to work, I asked Madiba whether he wanted to go and see the movie as it related to history he knew so well. Nu Metro booked out the entire cinema for Madiba and arranged a private screening at a time convenient to him, helping us of course to get into a back entrance to the cinema. When someone offered him popcorn he said: 'No I've had enough of that in my life, it is now the turn of the young people like them [pointing at me and security] to have that.' I doubt Madiba was ever introduced to popcorn, but since he had never 'snacked' in his life he was not eager to do so now. He thoroughly enjoyed the movie and when I told him that Forest Whitaker, who played Idi Amin in the movie, was visiting South Africa, he was eager to meet him. On two other occasions he also went to the movies, once to see Fahrenheit 9/11 – the Michael Moore movie – and once to see The Queen. During the screening of the latter he turned to me a few times and whispered when he saw Helen Mirren on the screen: 'By the

way, that is the Queen, right?' It was precious to see someone like Madiba enjoying a movie, something he was not used to but something we take for granted.

I remember when South African film director Gavin Hood won an Oscar for the film Tsotsi featuring South African actors Terry Pheto and Presley Chweneyagae. The three came to visit Madiba at his residence in Cape Town after returning from Los Angeles and we were extremely proud of them. This was only the second time South Africans had won an Oscar (following Charlize Theron) and it dominated the news for days. Madiba was so excited about holding an Oscar that he jokingly asked them whether they would not consider giving it to him. There was complete confusion on Gavin Hood's face. Of course you would even give your Oscar to Nelson Mandela. Or not.

* * *

Early in 2007 Prince Albert of Monaco offered to host a fundraiser for the Foundation together with his own Foundation later in the year in Monaco, providing that Madiba attended. Madiba was tired of travelling and only wanted to stay home and spend time with Mrs Machel. However when royalty invited him, he was more eager to agree. Occasionally he would suggest we travel somewhere but then he would forget and we knew that he wasn't too keen or else he would remember. I was tasked by Achmat Dangor, our CEO at the time, to work with a colleague and the Royal office in Monaco on the event.

I would travel to Monaco every month. We had meetings with the office of Prince Albert but it soon became clear that they had, like any administration, their own power struggles. It was one of the most difficult tasks to negotiate.

I contacted every person I knew with a little money to their name to sell tables to them for the event. I emailed people I'd met over the years to tell them about the auction items that would go on sale and that we hoped they would support us, and they did. At the end most of Madiba's friends from over the years showed up. It took me nine months of intense communication with people worldwide to persuade them to support the initiative and to travel to Monaco at their own expense to come and support an auction. It was a successful fundraiser. It all paid off and I was proud of what we had achieved. The Foundation raised a considerable amount of money, building a much-needed endowment to ensure its sustainability into the future

yet still not enough to feel secure.

I fell ill during one of my visits to Monaco and ended up being admitted to hospital for X-rays. I thought I had pneumonia. Apart from the fact that no one could understand a word of English, which made a simple procedure like examining a patient almost impossible, the hospital was not great. As soon as I could stand up straight, I took a plane to London where two of my ex-colleagues, a doctor and bodyguard, lived and I had to rely on them for help. The irony was that here I was, thinking that I was dying and the only people to help me were ex-colleagues. There was no other support structure in my life than those who worked with me, and I realized how isolated I had become from life in general.

Before travelling to Monaco Madiba and Mrs Machel stopped in London to unveil a statue of Madiba at Parliament Square. In between organizing Monaco I also had to regularly meet with Wendy Woods, wife of the late Donald Woods, both anti-apartheid activists, with regards to arrangements around the unveiling. Wendy was heading the organizing committee together with Richard Attenborough. I adored him and loved meeting with him. It was a historical event and one of the few occasions Madiba could be convinced to unveil a statue of himself. He was never in favour of things being named after him, statues being erected and him being honoured everywhere. He constantly reminded us that there were other struggle heroes too who had to be recognized and honoured. And then if he agreed to a statue like this one, he would not be in favour of unveiling it himself out of fear that he may appear conceited.

We had a close relationship with the Browns and their staff and it was always pleasant to visit them. Even though Gordon Brown would be present at the unveiling of the statue a few days later it was appropriate for us to pay a courtesy call to him before meeting him at the unveiling ceremony. On 28 August 2008, before entering 10 Downing Street I briefed Madiba about the press awaiting our arrival and that we had agreed with the Prime Minister’s office that there would be a short photo opportunity with the media when the PM met Madiba and Mrs Machel. Madiba was becoming very forgetful and even admitted so himself, in public. He needed constant reminders of what was expected of him and minute-by-minute warnings of what he had to do next. But then there were always these moments of complete clarity when he would surprise us all with his sharp sense of humour, totally aware of what he was doing and getting up to.

I had told him that he would not be expected to answer any questions from the press upon his arrival in Downing Street but he could simply say that he was happy to be there and to meet with Gordon Brown. When we entered the two exchanged pleasantries and Madiba turned to the media and jokingly said: 'My wife and I are proud and happy to be here because as you know, this was one of our rulers, but we overthrew them. We are on equal basis now.' Everybody started laughing. Everybody except me that is. I was shocked and didn't know how the media would perceive such a statement. Madiba had a very good sense of humour and this was his way of emphasizing that we had moved away from colonialism.

We tried to be careful not to allow situations to occur where he could feel overwhelmed and it increased the stress and tension. I no longer felt worried whenever I had to deliver his speech to the podium. My insecurities now revolved around him. Was he going to be OK? Could he handle the pressure? But every time he walked onto a stage and stood behind a podium, the old Madiba was back and he was as strong as ever. It was hard for us younger people to witness the ageing process, and also not always knowing how to deal with it. You had to adapt and adjust things all the time, thinking, planning, providing for every possible scenario just to make sure that he would be OK and that every possible eventuality could be catered for. Over the years making simple appointments for others with him changed from 'Yes for sure it's confirmed' to 'Let's confirm closer to the time' to 'It's difficult to predict any day right now' to 'It's simply no longer possible'. It had its own metamorphoses and ageing timeline to it.

After the successful fundraiser in Monaco we also went to Paris. President Sarkozy came to the airport to meet us, and Madiba was touched by his kind gesture and repeated for years to follow that it was extremely courteous of a serving head of state to come all the way to the airport to meet a former President. It was the first time we had visited the Ritz Hotel since the death of Princess Diana. Being who I am, I secretly asked the manager to show me the route she'd walked and recite the exact events and steps from that night. I was not trying to investigate the matter but trying to comprehend what that night must have been like.

* * *

I was aware that many of those I loved were growing older. Madiba

turned eighty-nine in 2007. I made sure we never forgot other people's birthdays, or when someone was ill we would send flowers and sometimes just enquire about their well-being without wanting something from them. It was my simplistic way of investing in relationships and to me it didn't make sense (and it was rude) only to call on people whenever you wanted something from them. I recently read: 'Life takes a little time and a lot of relationship' and that captures it all.

I think people often wondered what I was busy with at the Foundation as it was difficult to measure outcome apart from specific fundraising initiatives I was tasked with. I was maintaining relationships. I attended luncheons, breakfasts and had more coffee than was good for any human being to show our appreciation and interest in people genuinely, whether they gave us money or not. Sometimes I felt overwhelmed by people, not being a people person generally speaking. But I showed interest nevertheless and it was always genuine and with the best intention. I made sure they all got Christmas cards or good wishes for Ramadan or Jewish festivities. As Madiba got older he could no longer do these personally and then the Foundation could no longer afford to print thousands of cards. I nevertheless tried to maintain these small gestures. After all, Madiba taught me the most important thing any person can give you is his/her time. He wrote in a letter to his daughter Zindzi, dated 1 March 1981, while he was imprisoned and published in Conversations With Myself:

> Often as I walk up and down the tiny cell, or as I lie on my bed, the mind wanders far and wide, recalling this episode and that mistake. Among these is the thought whether in my best days outside prison I showed sufficient appreciation for the love and kindness of many of those who befriended and even helped me when I was poor and struggling.

What I read from it was that it was of vital importance to him to be courteous and grateful at all times, as we never know whether we will have the opportunity to thank people or pay respect whenever they have been good to you.

It was also my father's seventieth birthday that year and my mother's seventieth the following year. We decided to all go on a family holiday and my brother, his partner and I decided to share my parents' costs. They hadn't been to Mauritius since the late 1970s and

we'd hardly had time for a family holiday so we set off to Sugar Beach resort in Mauritius. While on holiday my brother's partner, Rick, received a call from his parents who were looking after all our dogs. I think there were about ten dogs on their smallholding outside Pretoria. I remember him taking the call and getting up from the table. He returned and I went to fetch food from the buffet. Upon returning things were sombre at the table and I asked after my dogs and they said everything was fine. My brother is a strange person though. He seemed irritable with me and I could sense something was wrong. On the night we got home I rushed off to the smallholding to fetch the dogs. As I parked my car, I realized my dad was already there, having rushed from the airport to arrive at the smallholding before I could. He walked towards me, took my hand and said: 'Zelda, Roxy is dead.' My baby. My poor baby was dead. She was in season when we left and the bitches were all kept in a small area where a fight broke out and the rest of the dogs formed a pack and killed the weakest.

It was one of the saddest days of my life. I regretted every minute I didn't spend with her and I wanted to blame my work for not spending enough time with her. How could I have children if I couldn't even find the time to spend with dogs? This was my child or the closest thing to a child I ever had and I felt that I had failed her.

I had to sit for a long time and decide that these are choices I had made in life. There is no one to blame but myself but I cannot use the word 'blame' when there had been so many privileges and opportunities. I cried and mourned and didn't go to work for three days over the death of Roxy. It was five days before 46664 was hosting a concert in Johannesburg. I couldn't pull myself together and it was the worst thing that had happened to me until then. It took me at least a year to get over her death and to this day she has her proud place in my house.

Roxy had had a litter the year before and I'd sold off her puppies (and two had died while very small). They all got names, proper politicians' names, before they left me, including Indira, named after Indira Gandhi, the third Prime Minister of India who was assassinated in 1984. However, in the April after Roxy died the people who'd bought Indira called me up to say that they would have to put her down as she was not adapting well and they were worried about their child. They wanted to tell me if I found another home for her they would be willing to give her to another owner but otherwise they

would put her down. I had her delivered to my house the same day and apart from her father Winston, she is now the love of my life. Having Boston terriers is therapeutic for me. They have seen me through the most difficult times. They are the ones I miss when I travel and they are the ones that I think of when at work during the day. I like to joke and say that at least I don't have to pay school fees for my 'children', so their school fees can be spent on my motorbike riding!

9

Vakansie en vriende

Teen dié tyd het ons soms weke lank op Shambala deurgebring. Madiba het gereeld mense uitgenooi om hom op die plaas te besoek en ons moes versigtig wees dat ons nie toelaat dat Shambala net nog 'n plek word waarheen mense stroom en waar hy deur besoekers oorweldig word nie. By een so 'n geleentheid het ons Zwelinzima Vavi en Blade Nzimande, onderskeidelik die voorsitter van Cosatu en die algemene sekretaris van die Suid-Afrikaanse Kommunisteparty, ontvang. Madiba het saam met hulle middagete geniet en daarna het hy my gevra om saam met hulle te ry om wild te besigtig. Shambala het die Groot Vyf van Afrika gehuisves en 'n mens kon maklik vier van dié vyf, wat leeus en olifante insluit, tydens 'n kort rit teëkom. Ek het van Blade en Zweli gehou omdat hulle my met respek en waardigheid behandel het ondanks al die gefluister oor my 'wit' teenwoordigheid in Madiba se lewe. Hulle het my nooit as 'n betaalde kneg beskou nie. Teen dié tyd was die SAKP en Cosatu in 'n drieledige alliansie met die ANC. Zweli en Blade het die rit geniet en in 'n stadium het ek na hulle omgedraai en gesê: 'Julle is nie veronderstel om hierdie te geniet nie, is julle?' Hulle het gelag en ek het voortgegaan: 'Kommuniste en sosialiste is nie veronderstel om kapitalisme te geniet nie. So as julle dit geniet, moet dit net nie wys nie.'

Teen die einde van 2003 het Madiba besoek ontvang van die hotelmagnaat Sol Kerzner. In die verlede was Suid-Afrika basies vir twee dinge bekend aan buitelanders: Nelson Mandela en Sun City. Sol het Sun City in die middel van die 1980's gebou en dit was uiters omstrede omdat dit in die gebied gebou is wat toe bekend gestaan het as Bophuthatswana, een van Suid-Afrika se tuislande met president Lucas Mangope in beheer. Mangope is in die 1980's as 'n ondersteuner van die apartheidsregering beskou. Ná sy vrylating het Madiba Sol gebel en hom oortuig om die heropbouing van Suid-Afrika te steun. Sol het dit met graagte gedoen. Hy het later sy aandele in Sun City verkoop en Kerzner International oorsee begin. Sol het Madiba van sy oord in Mauritius vertel en hom genooi om daar vakansie te gaan hou. Ons het reëlings getref sodat Madiba en mevrou Machel en van die kleinkinders soontoe kon gaan.

Dit was soos om in die paradys aan te kom. Sol het 'n private villa vir Madiba en mevrou Machel by die One & Only Le Saint Géran-hotel in Mauritius bespreek terwyl die res van ons in die hotel langs die villa tuisgegaan het. Natuurlik het Sol geweet Madiba en Mum sou met 'n gevolg kom; geen president of voormalige president reis daarsonder nie. 'n Mens moet ook versigtig wees dat jy nie mense laat voel jy misbruik hulle nie, al is hulle ook hoe ryk. Hy het aangebied om vir my, die dokter en die kleinkinders wat Madiba wou saambring te betaal. Wat ek altyd van my baas waardeer het, was dat hy nooit mense se gasvryheid misbruik het nie. Hoewel Sol vir ons sou betaal, het ons nie die minikroeg leeg geëet en gedrink of internasionale oproepe op die hotelfone gemaak nie, maar eerder die gasvryheid gerespekteer en waardeer.

Teen dié tyd het ek al tien jaar lank vir Madiba gewerk en ek het nog nooit gesien dat hy 'n vakansie so baie geniet het nie. Hy het alleentye saam met sy vrou en kleinkinders gehad en ons het maaltye soos 'n groot uitgebreide familie saam geniet. Vir die eerste keer was daar geen haas nie. En dit was moeilik om daaraan gewoond te raak. Mum moes ons altyd daaraan herinner om te ontspan en dat ons op vakansie was. Ons het vertonings deur dansers van Mauritius bygewoon en dit was een van die twee geleenthede wat ek onthou waar Madiba met Mum gedans het. Hy het ook gelag en daarop aangedring dat ons die 'Pata Pata' doen. 'Pata Pata' was 'n groot

treffer van die legendariese sangeres Miriam Makeba wat sy saam met ’n ander legende, Dorothy Masuka, geskryf het. Die liedjie is in 1957 uitgereik, voor Madiba tronk toe is, en in 1967 het dit die Amerikaanse Billboard Hot 100 gehaal toe Madiba reeds in die tronk was. Die Xhosa-liedjie beteken ‘raak-raak’ en terwyl dit gesing word, is jy veronderstel om te wys hoe jy jou dansmaat aanraak. Een van die lyfwagte, Sydney Nkonoane, het vir my gewys hoe ’n mens die ‘Pata Pata’ dans en Madiba het dit terdeë geniet en geskater van die lag. Hy het so baie van die liedjie gehou dat ek my kon verbeel ek sien hom hoe hy dit in 1950 gedans het.

Ek en die veiligheidspersoneel sou soggens oefeninge doen terwyl Mum gaan stap, en daarna sou ons ’n laat ontbyt geniet, swem en die res van die dag in die son naby Madiba deurbring. Hy het op die grasperk in die skaduwee sit en uitkyk oor die see en vir toeriste gewaai wat, soos hy dit beskryf het, ‘halfnaak’ verbystap; mense in swemklere. Hy het dit geniet om almal van ons heeltyd naby hom te hê. Tuis was ons almal altyd so besig dat ’n mens feitlik nie kans gekry het om die tyd wat jy saam deurbring te waardeer nie, en hier het ons uitgesien na maaltye wat ons saam kon geniet.

Ons enigste verbinding met die huis was natuurlik koerantuitknipsels. Ek moes seker maak dat die personeel in die kantoor in Johannesburg elke oggend, voor Madiba wakker word, stories uit die koerante knip en dit vir hom faks. Hy het min belang gestel in die internasionale publikasies wat ’n mens op die eiland kon kry en het aangedring op nuus van die tuisfront. Wel, ons kon nie wag dat hy die berigte klaar lees sodat hy die nuus met ons kon deel nie. Die arme personeel by die stigting se kantoor moes te alle tye op kantoor wees om die uitknipsels voor te berei en vir ons te stuur, waar ons ook al was.

Na ’n paar dae het Madiba aangekondig dat hy in die water wou gaan. Ons was versigtig hieroor en nie seker of hy regop sou kon staan in die water nie. Dit was nie vir hom maklik om te stap nie en hy het altyd sy kierie gebruik. Die veiligheidspersoneel het hom teen die terras afgehelp en hy het op ’n stoel in die water gesit sodat die golwe oor sy voete kon spoel. Die plesier op sy gesig het my hart geraak op ’n manier wat moeilik is om te beskryf. Hoe kan iets só doodgewoon, wat ons almal as vanselfsprekend aanvaar, soveel plesier aan ’n mens

verskaf?

Ons het toe verneem dat Madiba veertig jaar laas in die see geswem het. Die laaste keer wat hy in die oseaan was, was toe hy seebamboes op Robbeneiland uit die water moes verwyder, maar dit was handearbeid onder toesig van tronkbewaarders in die koue Atlantiese Oseaan, en dit was toe dat hy op ’n rots gegly het en sy knie blywende skade aangedoen is. Hier in Mauritius was dit so anders. Mum het hom gehelp om weer eenvoudige dinge te ervaar, soos maaltye saam met die familie, sonskyn en om die skoonheid van die lewe in blomme, landskappe en musiek te waardeer – dinge wat hom sedert sy vrylating verbygegaan het.

Madiba het begin moeg raak vir sy besige program en wou meer tyd by Shambala deurbring om te skryf. Hy het begin sê hy wil ‘aftree’ en ek het hom daaraan herinner dat hy klaar afgetree was. Ons het dit met professor Gerwel bespreek en ’n nuuskonferensie belê om bekend te maak dat hy nou selfs van sy aftrede gaan aftree. Op 1 Junie 2004 het Madiba by die nuuskonferensie gesê: ‘Moenie my bel nie, ek sal jou bel.’ Wel, die mense het glad nie opgehou bel nie. Die openbare druk het aangehou en hy moes geleenthede bywoon waar hy vereer is, projekte vir mense open of inmeng by situasies waar mense gevoel het hulle het geen ander uitweg nie. Almal het hulself as die uitsondering op die reël beskou; die een vir wie Madiba sy aftrede opsy moes skuif. Hy het almal spesiaal laat voel en daarom het almal gedink hulle het ’n spesiale verhouding met hom. Dieselfde mense wat gekla het dat hy te besig is, of dat hy te veel van dit of dat gedoen het, was die mense vir wie hy soms uitsonderings moes maak. In daardie omstandighede het dit gevoel of jy mal kon raak. Baie van die mense wat gesê het hulle het ’n spesiale verhouding met hom, het dit vir hom moeilik gemaak om uit te tree tot hy ’n ouderdom bereik het waar hy eenvoudig nie meer enigiets fisiek kon doen nie.

Die ANC sou ook op sy knoppie druk. Die volgende verkiesing was om die draai en die party het Madiba laat weet dat hulle finansieel in die knyp was. Groot maatskappye wou nie hê dit moet lyk of hulle een party bo ’n ander verkies nie, dus het Madiba oudpresident F.W. de Klerk se hulp ook ingeroep. Die vyande uit die verlede het kragte saamgesnoer om geld vir die Nuwe Nasionale Party en die ANC in te samel. Ek moes vir albei afsprake met uitvoerende hoofde maak en

hulle het saam gevra vir hulp vir die partye waarvan hulle eens die leiers was. Natuurlik het enige maatskappy dit geniet om Madiba en meneer De Klerk in hul kantore te hê en hul pogings om geld in te samel was suksesvol.

In Maart 2004 het Charlize Theron die eerste Suid-Afrikaner geword wat ’n Oscar by die Academy Awards in Los Angeles verower het vir haar rol in die fliek *Monster* en sy was spoedig terug in Suid-Afrika op besoek aan die land van haar herkoms. Madiba was in Maputo, maar hy het ingestem om na Johannesburg terug te keer om Charlize te ontmoet. Daar was chaos in die media. Ons het koeksisters bestel nadat Charlize genoem het dat sy hulle graag in Suid-Afrika sou wou eet. Madiba het vir haar koeksisters aangebied en hoewel sy een geneem het, het sy dit nooit geëet nie. Charlize het aangekondig dat sy by vigsliefdadigheid betrokke wou raak, maar ek is nie seker hoeveel sy van die fyner punte van die siekte geweet het nie. Ná hul ontmoeting het hulle saam voor die media verskyn en sy het vir Madiba voor die hele wêreld gesê hoe lief sy hom het. Vroue was altyd lief vir Madiba en hy was baie sjarmant en het graag komplimente uitgedeel.

Dit kon nie lekker gewees het vir mevrou Machel om te hoor hoe mense hul onsterflike liefde aan Madiba verklaar, en Madiba wat op sy beurt so sjarmant teenoor hulle optree nie, maar sy het nooit gekla nie. Ek onthou voorvalle in sy presidentskap toe dit een te veel geraak het, toe al die vroue in die personeel hom gesoengroet het. Hulle is toe aangesê om dit nie meer in die openbaar te doen nie. Dit was snaaks. Almal was gek na Madiba, maar dit sou ’n hindernis geword het as die publiek sien dat vroue hom soen waar hy ook al beweeg.

Omtrent ’n jaar later het ons probeer om Charlize in die hande te kry om haar te vra om ’n boodskap op te neem ter ondersteuning van Madiba se 46664-vigsbewussynsveldtog. Aanvanklik het ons gesukkel om haar in die hande te kry en toe ons dit uiteindelik regkry, het haar reklamebeampte gesê Charlize is besig om ’n rolprent te skiet en het nie tyd gehad om die promosie-opname, wat twintig sekondes sou duur, te maak nie. Ek het daarop aangedring dat sy vyf minute in haar tyd daarvoor sou kon vind, maar ek is meegedeel dat dit nie moontlik was nie. Ons het gekrenk gevoel omdat Madiba tydens haar besoek aan Suid-Afrika van ’n ander stad Johannesburg toe gevlieg het om

haar te kan sien. Sy het toe wel later gehelp toe sy self gehoor het van ons versoek. Soms kan mens se personeel baie skade aan mens se reputasie en verhoudings aanrig, soos ons al self geleer het.

Een van die ministers wat Madiba in die kabinet aangestel het, die minister van inligting, Joe Nhlanhla, het twee beroerte-aanvalle gehad en was bedlêend. Kgalema Motlanthe, die destydse sekretaris-generaal van die ANC, het Madiba laat weet dit gaan nie goed met Joe nie. Ons het hom in die hospitaal besoek en verneem hy het nie genoeg geld om na 'n hospies geneem te word nie. Madiba het sakelui gevra om 'n fonds te stig vir Joe en hy is spoedig daarna na 'n sentrum geneem waar daar ordentlik na hom omgesien kon word. Ek was hartseer toe ek van sy dood hoor, maar dit het my ook gepla dat verantwoordelikhede van dié aard nog steeds op die bejaarde Madiba afgekom het asof hy mense vir ewig sou moes terugbetaal vir wat hulle in die verlede vir hom beteken het. Met tye was daar onophoudelike versoeke en dit het geklink asof almal wou hê hy moet hulle persoonlik uit die finansiële gemors help waarin hulle hul bevind.

Op 24 Maart 2004 het ons weer na Saoedi-Arabië vertrek. Soms was dit om geld in te samel en soms net om aan 'n versoek van die Saoedi's te voldoen. Ek het nou my eie abaya besit en was heel gemaklik wanneer ek dit aangehad en in dié land beweeg het. Na my vorige ervaring het ek geweet ek moet my frustrasie met die Saoedi's onderdruk. Ek het ons besoek geniet omdat ek presies geweet het wat om te verwag en wat om te doen, en ek was bereid om hul reëls na te kom en het nie meer onrealistiese verwagtinge gehad nie. Dit was nog steeds vir my moeilik om met party van die amptenare te kommunikeer, aangesien hulle nie maklik na vroue geluister het nie. Maar terwyl ek by Madiba was, het hulle toegegee.

Madiba moes die koning ontmoet en soos gewoonlik is ek aangesê dat ek hom nie sou kon vergesel nie, omdat geen vrou ooit die koning ontmoet nie. Maar Madiba het daarop aangedring en 'n boodskapper het laat weet dat ek tog toegelaat sou word om die koning te sien. Met ons aankoms by die paleis het Madiba gedoen wat hy gewoonlik doen wanneer hy besorg was dat ek sou 'wegraak'. Die oomblik toe hy uit die motor klim, het hy gesê: 'Waar is my sekretaresse?' Die manne sou rondhardloop op soek na die sekretaresse en dan sou hulle my

inderhaas na hom toe neem. Ek sou soms opsetlik 'n rukkie langer in die motor bly sit omdat ek geweet het ek sou nooit op my eie deur die veiligheidskordon kon kom nie. As Madiba my nie geroep het nie, sou ek daar vasgesit het. Toe ons die paleis binnegaan, omring deur 'n massa mense, het hy my hand geneem. Ek het ongemaklik gevoel omdat ek geweet het my teenwoordigheid as die enigste vrou was ongehoord, en tweedens was dit onvanpas vir 'n ongetroude vrou om aan 'n man te raak. Maar hy het my hand nie gelos nie en hy het die reëls baie goed geken.

Ons is na die wagkamer begelei waar ons gesit het tot die koning Madiba laat roep het. Hy het my hand weer gevat toe ons die koninklike vertrek binnestap. Toe hy die koning groet het ek agter hom bly staan. Ek wou omdraai en weghardloop, maar ek het nie. Ek het baie ongemaklik gevoel. Madiba het toe omgedraai en gesê: 'U Majesteit, hierdie is my sekretaresse en kleindogter, Zelda la Grange.' Ek het geweet ek was ook nie veronderstel om oogkontak met die koning te maak nie. Ek het my kop laat sak en geglimlag, hoewel ek geweet het ek moenie buig nie. Madiba was uiters onverdraagsaam teenoor mense wat in dié soort situasie onderdanig was. Maar ek was regtig bang. Die enigste gedagte wat deur my kop gegaan het, was dat die koning kon sien ek is nie swart nie en dat ek nie Madiba se kleindogter kon wees nie. Hy het sy hand uitgesteek om my te groet. Ek het gesien Madiba knik sy kop en ek het my hand uitgesteek. Die koning het my hand gevat en ek het sweet teen my rug voel afloop.

Die monarg was duidelik oud, maar hy het vriendelik gelyk. Hy het deur 'n tolk met ons gepraat en my welkom geheet. Ek wou gehad het hy moes my hand los, maar hy het nie. Hy het my gevra hoe dit gaan en Madiba het hom in die rede geval en gesê dat ek pas voor ons vertrek uit Johannesburg beroof is toe iemand my motorvenster stukkend geslaan en my handsak van die voorste sitplek gesteel het. Ek was regtig die vorige aand erg ontsteld voor ons die vliegtuig bestyg het. My hele lewe was in daardie handsak en vir die eerste keer het ek op 'n vliegtuig geklim sonder soveel as 'n selfoon. Maar op daardie oomblik was ek baie meer besorg oor die feit dat ek Saoedi-Arabië se kulturele reëls verbreek deur in dieselfde vertrek as die koning te wees. Madiba het vir hom gesê ek is nog steeds geskok en die koning het sy simpatie uitgespreek. Hy het uiteindelik my hand

gelos en ons het almal gaan sit om saam met hom tee te drink. Die koning het nie meer gereeld besoekers ontvang nie omdat hy oud en siek was. Ons het nietemin ’n kort gesprek met hom gehad en toe is ons daar weg. Hy het duidelik baie van Madiba gehou en het die hoflikheidsbesoek waardeer.

Madiba het ook gevra of hy die kroonprins kan ontmoet, en dis toe wat ons in die agtermiddag gedoen het. Hy was duidelik die heerser van Saoedi-Arabië en hy het meer tydsdruk gehad. Daar het reeds hervormings in sy kantoor en omgewing plaasgevind en my teenwoordigheid was nie ’n probleem nie. Ons het ’n paar dae in Saoedi-Arabië oorgehad en Madiba het die idee gekry dat ons Medina en Mekka moes besoek. Laasgenoemde is die plek waarheen die Moslems ’n pelgrimstog as eerbetoon onderneem. Alles was gereël, maar toe is ek meegedeel dat ek nie sou kon saamgaan nie omdat ek nie ’n Moslem is nie. My antwoord aan die amptenaar was: ‘Maar Madiba is ook nie ’n Moslem nie.’ Hulle was stomgeslaan, want hulle het gedink hy is een. Dit was een ding van Madiba wat my altyd gefassineer het: hy kon so goed by mense inpas dat almal begin glo het hy is een van hulle.

Ons het toe nie Medina of Mekka besoek nie. Na Saoedi-Arabië sou ons eers Tunisië en daarna Iran besoek. In Tunis was Madiba veronderstel om ’n direksievergadering van die Afrika-Infrastruktuurfonds by te woon. In Iran sou hy daardie land se grootste eerbewys van president Mohammad Khatami ontvang. In Tunis was Madiba moeg en hy het nie die vergadering bygewoon nie, maar net ’n kort onthaal. Cyril Ramaphosa was saam met ons en het verduidelik dat Madiba moeg was en nie die vergadering kon bywoon nie. Dit was die eerste keer dat Madiba gesê het hy was eenvoudig te moeg om enigiets te doen. Vir my was dit ’n groot krisis. Ek het nie geweet hoe om dit aan mense te verduidelik nie. Gelukkig het Cyril al die verduidelikings gedoen en dit was nie vir my nodig om enige skuld te dra nie. Ek het ook soos gewoonlik vir professor Gerwel gebel en hy en Cyril het uit een mond gepraat: ‘As hy iets nie wil doen nie, dan moet hy nie. Hy het die volste reg om moeg te wees.’ Toe het Madiba aangekondig dat hy nie meer Iran toe wou gaan nie, maar reguit huis toe. Hy het nog nooit vantevore ’n internasionale reis afgestel of net

nie in staat daartoe gevoel nie. Ons het die Iranse regering in kennis gestel en hulle was uiteraard baie teleurgesteld. Madiba wou tyd saam met sy vrou by die huis deurbring en hy wou nie meer hê ’n skedule moes sy lewe dikteer nie. Ek het verwag dat hierdie tekens vroeër sou intree, maar het dit aan hom oorgelaat om self te besluit wanneer genoeg genoeg was. Dit was nietemin ’n verrassing toe dit gebeur.

Terug in Suid-Afrika het Madiba besluit hy wou ’n geskenk aan die koning en kroonprins van Saoedi-Arabië stuur om hulle te bedank vir hul gasvryheid oor die jare heen. Hy het my vir voorstelle gevra. Omdat die Saoedi’s so ryk is, was dit ’n baie groot uitdaging. Ek het voorgestel dat ons vir elkeen twee springbokke en twee gemsbokke stuur. Ek het my navorsing gedoen en geweet hulle sou in die Saoedi-omgewing kon oorleef. Wat gee ’n mens vir iemand wat al reeds alles besit wat die hart mag begeer of wat geld kan koop? Ek het geweet al twee van hulle is lief vir diere en daarom sou hulle die bokke waardeer. Madiba het saamgestem.

Ons het die destydse plaasbestuurder van Shambala, Dries Krog, gevra om ons te help. Die diere moes in kwarantyn gaan voor hulle oorsee gestuur kon word. Dit het weke gekos om al die nodige papierwerk te doen en ons moes ook nog uitvoerpermitte kry. Deur die jare het mense my baie keer gevra wat my werk presies behels. Ek het nooit geweet waar om te begin nie, maar dan sou ek sê ek kan tik, telefone beantwoord, nuuskonferensies reël en springbokke en gemsbokke na Saoedi-Arabië uitvoer.

Tuis het ons nog ’n ANC-byeenkoms bygewoon voor die verkiesing, maar teen dié tyd het Madiba die lus verloor om self stemme te werf. In dié tyd was daar ’n vergadering van die ANC se nasionale uitvoerende komitee waar mense gekla het oor Madiba se sogenaamde gebrek aan respek vir die president. Die beswaardes was egter nooit bereid om dié klagtes self aan Madiba te stel nie en ons moes dit by ander mense hoor by die vergadering was.

Suid-Afrika het ’n bod ingesit vir die Wêreldbeker-sokkertoernooi van 2010. Madiba is daarvan ingelig, maar ons het ons rolletjie as iets baie klein gesien, aangesien die staatshoof veronderstel is om so iets aan te dryf. Laat in 2004 het Tokyo Sexwale, die voormalige premier van Gauteng en toe ’n sakeman aan die spits van ’n sakeryk van etlike miljarde rande, Madiba kom besoek en gevra hy moet saamgaan na

Trinidad en Tobago om te help stemme werf. Madiba was moeg en hy was nie lus vir reis nie en dis wat hy aan die begin gesê het. Maar Tokyo, wat een van die lede van die bodkomitee was, wou dit nie aanvaar nie en twee aande later was ons op pad na Trinidad en Tobago. Ons as Madiba se adviseurs het nie beheer gehad oor sy besluite nie en ons kon nie verseker dat hy altyd konsekwent optree nie. Dit het die publiek verwar. Hulle het nie geweet wie het die mag in die strukture om hom nie. Ek het baie keer geweier om daardie verantwoordelikheid te aanvaar en hoe hard ek ook al probeer het om sy wense uit te voer, is besluite uiteindelik deur baie faktore van buite beïnvloed. Uiteindelik moes Madiba self besluit en as hy eers ingestem het om iets te doen of omgepraat is, was dit baie moeilik om hom te oorreed om van besluit te verander. Dieselfde het gegeld wanneer hy iets nié wou doen nie. Hy kon baie koppig raak.

Ek het daarop aangedring dat dit ’n laeprofiel-besoek moet wees en dat die program beperk moes word. Die doel van die besoek was om lede van Fifa wat in Trinidad of in ander dele van die gebied woon, te oorreed om vir Suid-Afrika se bod te stem. Ons het in ’n gemaklike vliegtuig gevlieg, maar Madiba was gewoond aan doodse stilte wanneer hy slaap. Die uitleg van die vliegtuig was van so ’n aard dat ’n mens verby hom moes stap om by die toilette te kom. Hy het nie rustig geslaap nie en dit het my gepla. Tokyo het sy bes probeer om almal se gemak te verseker, maar toe ons land en ek deur die venster kyk, het ek gesien die regering het ’n volle erewag vir Madiba se aankoms gereël, al het ons gesê hulle moenie. Dit was onprakties om van Madiba te verwag om na so ’n lang vlug seremoniële pligte na te kom. Nadat ek die erewag ge-sien het, het ek en Tokyo woorde gewissel en ek het hom gevra om iets omtrent die saak te doen. Hy kon self sien Madiba is moeg en hy het Jack Warner, die Fifa-lid in Trinidad wat baie mag in daardie land gehad het, gevra om saam met ons op die vliegtuig te klim. Ons is in kennis gestel dat die erewag net daar was om Madiba welkom te heet en dat hy dadelik van die lughawe af kon vertrek.

Die hele besoek was ’n stryd. Twee weke na die besoek aan Trinidad is ons Zürich toe, waar Suid-Afrika die bod gewen het om die Wêreldbekertoernooi aan te bied. Ek aanvaar dit was die moeite werd. Na Zürich is ons na Douw Steyn se landgoed in die Engelse platteland

waar ons ’n paar dae kon rus.

Ek kan nie onthou watter jaar dit gebeur het nie, maar tydens een van ons besoeke aan Londen het ons ’n hoflikheidsbesoek aan die premier, Tony Blair, gebring. Ek het elke besoek aan 10 Downing Street geniet, veral nadat ek dit in die 2003-fliek *Love Actually* gesien het. Toe Hugh Grant in die fliek in die rol van die premier in een van die kamers van 10 Downing Street gedans het, het ek geglimlag, want ek was self in daardie kamer. Maar ek het nie gedans nie. Hierdie keer het ons baie vinnig gereed gemaak vir ons afspraak. Die premier was ruimhartig teenoor Madiba en toe ons terugkeer na die Dorchester-hotel waar ons gebly het, was ons tevrede met die besoek.

Dit was herfs en die son het later opgekom en vroeër gaan sak. Dan was dit ook soos altyd bewolk. Toe ek by die Dorchester uit die motor klim, het ek gesien ek het ’n onpaar skoene aan. Jou idioot, het ek gedink. Ek het my eenvoudig te veel vir my fout geskaam om dit aan enigeen te noem, maar het dit wel later met die dokter gedeel en ons het saam daaroor gelag. Ek het altyd in ’n spesifieke kamer in die Dorchester oorgebly wanneer ek saam met Madiba daar was. ’n Voormalige Suid-Afrikaner, Nigel Badminton, die hotelbestuurder tydens al ons besoeke daar, het dit gereël. Die kamer het ’n klein aantrekkamer ingesluit. Dit was eerder ’n hoekie as ’n kamer. Daar was geen natuurlike lig nie en ek moes op die elektriese lig staatmaak. Ek was so haastig voor ons vertrek – ek moes almal saamroep en seker maak Madiba is gereed – dat ek nie agtergekom het ek trek ’n onpaar skoene aan nie. Die twee pare was min of meer in dieselfde styl met soortgelyke hakke en daarom kon ek nie ’n verskil voel nie, maar die een was swart en die ander donkerbruin. Tot vandag toe dink ek dit was een van my grootste flaters. Ek wens ek kon die tyd terugdraai om so iets te verhinder en ek wonder wie in 10 Downing Street het dit raakgesien.

Van Londen af is ons Spanje toe, waar Madiba en mevrou Machel die troue van koning Juan Carlos en koningin Sofia se seun bygewoon het. Dit was niks minder as ’n feëverhaal nie. Die gaste was meestal koninklikes van ander lande en feitlik geen politici is daarheen uitgenooi nie. Ons sou Madiba daaroor terg, maar hy het ons daaraan herinner dat hy ook van koninklike afkoms is. Dalk was hy net ’n Xhosa-koninklike, maar hy was nietemin steeds ’n koninklike en hy

het daarvan gehou as iemand hom daaraan herinner dat hy ’n prins is.

Op 24 Mei 2004 het die bekende bokspromotor Don King ons besoek. Hy was ’n omstrede karakter, maar dit was weer ’n geleentheid waar ons aangesê is dat Madiba hom moes ontvang. Omdat Madiba self ’n bokser was, het hy nie teëgestribbel nie. Ek was in my kantoor toe die ontvangsdame bel en sê King het opgedaag. Ek het vir ’n oomblik vergeet dat ons hom verwag het en gevra: ‘Die koning van wat?’ En inderdaad was dit King, die koning van boks. Baie van hierdie oomblikke het ons dae ligter gemaak en die waansin afgeweer.

Soos mense verwag het, het Madiba na ’n kort rustyd, en ondanks sy aftrede, besluit hy wil die internasionale vigskonferensie in Thailand bywoon. Hy wou graag daardie stryd voortsit, selfs al was hy afgetree, en hy wou ’n sterk boodskap agterlaat. Dit was kort voor sy ses-en-tagtigste verjaardag. Op pad terug van Thailand het ek ’n stukkie vir die *Sunday Independent* geskryf nadat hulle my gevra het vir ’n verjaardagboodskap aan hom. Die Sondag van sy verjaardag het die artikel op die voorblad verskyn onder die opskrif: ‘Khulu, wat ek u toewens vir u ses-en-tagtigste verjaardag, is tyd. Zelda.’ Dis regtig wat ek hom toegewens het. Tyd vir nadenke en tyd saam met sy vrou. Maar sodra dinge te stil raak, sou hy weer iets begin. Sy afgetrede status het nou verander na ‘hy moet toegelaat word om te doen wat hy wil’. En daar gaan ons toe al weer. Ek het dit gesien as ’n stryd in sy binneste. Hy wou by die huis wees, maar hy wou nie van die wêreld afgesny wees nie. Ons het besef hy sal eenvoudig nooit ophou nie. Die oomblik toe ons begin tekens uitstuur dat hy weer beskikbaar was, het die gewone groepies hul weg oopgesien om hom weer te nader.

Ek het gevoel asof sommige lede van die familie en hul kennisse nie my teenwoordigheid in sy lewe goedgekeur het nie. Dit het gelyk of party van hulle se afguns persoonlik was en ander weer asof hulle ongemaklik was met die idee dat hy op ’n wit vrou staatgemaak het. Ek het vasgevang gevoel tussen my plig teenoor Madiba en die gedagte dat ek ’n las vir hom begin word. Sodra ek wou terugstaan, sou hy my bel of soms geïrriteerd raak omdat ek nie op my pos is nie. Hy het by die dag meer afhanklik van my geword, en om ’n paar baie eenvoudige redes: hy was oud, hy het iemand nodig gehad wat saam

met hom kon wees by ’n vergadering omdat hy herinner moes word aan wat hy kon verwag en wat volgende sou gebeur. Sy geheue was nie meer so goed soos in die verlede nie. Ek het gevoel ek is onder druk en hy het dit gesien.

Madiba het my aangesê om te gaan sit en toe vir my ’n lesing gegee oor die feit dat ek vir hom gewerk het en dat ek moes doen wat hy my vra en dat ek nie ander mense moet toelaat om my aandag af te trek nie. Noudat ek daaraan terugdink, voel ek ek moes toe hy nog in staat was om my te verdedig, ’n paar mense aangesê het om hul klagtes direk aan hom te rig. Maar ek wou hom nooit belas met my probleme nie. Ek moes die feit aanvaar dat ’n jong, wit Afrikanervrou wat na hom omsien altyd vreemd en ongewild sou wees. Tog was ek vasbeslote om hom nie te versaak nie, solank as wat hy my daar wou hê. Hy het ’n paar keer vir my vertel van hierdie onvergenoegde besoekers wat uitdagend was oor sy besluit om ’n wit Afrikanervrou aan te stel. Die eerste keer was hy versigtig oor die manier waarop hy my dit meegedeel het, maar na ’n paar keer het ons al twee gelag wanneer hy die storie sou herhaal.

Xoliswa, wat lank as Madiba se sjef gewerk het, en ek het gereeld oor die foon gepraat omdat sy gewoonlik aan diens was wanneer ek hom in die hande wou kry. Ons het tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat almal ons werk wou hê, maar dat niemand bereid was om die ure en moeite in te sit nie.

Vroeg in 2003 het ek agtergekom iets kwel Madiba. Hy was dae lank teruggetrokke en stroef. Madiba het my vertel dat sy enigste oorlewende seun, Makgatho, by die huis was om te sê hy het vigs. Ek was platgeslaan deur die slegte nuus maar het Madiba belowe ek sou enigiets doen om hom by te staan.

Toe Makgatho in Desember 2004 in die hospitaal opgeneem is, is ek die eerste middag saam met Madiba soontoe. Makgatho was reeds in die hoësorgeenheid. Madiba het ingegaan en daarop aangedring dat ek saamkom. Voorheen het ons Makgatho so nou en dan gesien, maar hy het eers later deel van Madiba se lewe geword. Ek het van hom gehou, hoewel ek min met hom te doen gehad het. Hy was altyd hoflik en respekvol teenoor my en wanneer ek hom ook al gevra het om te help met iets rakende Madiba, of om iets namens sy pa by te woon, was hy bereid. In hierdie stadium het ek nie geweet hoekom die kinders uit

Madiba se eerste huwelik glad nie deel van sy lewe was nie, maar ek kon sien hoe mevrou Machel probeer het om die familie byeen te bring. Sy was altyd besig om vrede te probeer beding tussen die verskillende dele van die familie en het daarop aangedring dat al sy kinders by sy lewe betrek word. Dit was nie maklik nie, omdat party van hulle bitter teenoor hom was. Omdat ek ’n werknemer was, het ek nooit met familiesake ingemeng nie.

Dit was vir my hartseer om Makgatho in die hospitaal te sien. Hy kon nie praat nie, maar Madiba het met hom gepraat en net voor ons vertrek het ek oorgebuig en gefluister: ‘Hallo, Makgatho, dit is Zelda. Onthou ons is baie lief vir jou. Wees sterk.’ Ek het voorheen gesien hoe ’n vigslyer gesond word en ek het gehoop dat hy ook sou. Voor ons weg is, het Makgatho se suster, Makaziwe, daar aangekom. Ek het die verpleegster gevra wat sy temperatuur was omdat ek vir Madiba wou troos en Makaziwe het vir my gesê: ‘Los asseblief my broer se mediese rekord uit, dit het niks met jou te doen nie.’ Ek wou bitter graag vir haar sê dat ek al twee jaar weet hy het vigs en dat ek niks sou doen om hom te skaad of oor die siekte te praat nie. Ek was maar net op soek na trooswoorde vir Madiba.

Ek was vir die Desembervakansie op Paternoster toe Meme, Madiba se huishoudster, my bel en laat weet ek moet huis toe kom, want dit gaan nie goed met Makgatho nie. Ek het geweet ek moet help en ondersteun waar ek kan en ek het my vakansie beëindig. Terwyl ek in my motor op pad was, is Makgatho oorlede en ek het hom dus nooit weer gesien na die eerste besoek in die hospitaal nie. Ek is nooit gevra om weg te bly nie, maar ek het geweet ek is nie welkom nie. Ek het mevrou Machel laat weet ek is terug by die huis, maar ek het twee dae gewag voor ek na Madiba se huis is om my meegevoel te betuig. Toe mevrou Machel my vra hoekom ek nie vroeër daar was nie, het ek gesê ek het geweet mense treur en ek wou nie ’n las wees of hulle met my teenwoordigheid irriteer nie. Sy het nie daarvan gehou dat ek sulke gevolgtrekkings maak nie, maar het tog verstaan hoe ek voel. Makgatho was die pa van Mandla, Ndaba, Mbuso en Andile. My hart was seer vir daardie kinders omdat hulle deel was van ons daaglikse lewe en dit het amper gevoel asof ek saam met hulle grootgeword het. Hulle het my deur daardie jare meestal soos ’n suster behandel en ons was baie na aan mekaar.

Ek het sover moontlik van die familie probeer wegbly terwyl hulle getreur het, maar ek was byderhand om met logistiek te help. Dit was ’n baie hartseer begrafnis en my hart was stukkend vir Madiba. In Afrika-tradisie word die liggaam van die afgestorwene huis toe gebring vir ’n nagwaak voor die begrafnis die volgende dag. Die persoon ‘slaap’ vir die laaste nag in sy of haar slaapkamer en die volgende oggend word ’n gebed in die ingangsportaal gedoen. Die liggaam is vir die laaste keer daar teenwoordig voor hulle met die begrafnis begin. Madiba het op my teenwoordigheid aangedring en dat ek moes meedoen aan die laaste afskeid. Mevrou Machel was langs hom en het sy hand dwarsdeur die seremonie styf vasgehou. Ek het nog net een keer vantevore ’n lyk gesien en dit was dié van my ouma aan my pa se kant toe ek nog ’n kind was. Daardie herinnering het my baie jare daarna nog gepla. Makgatho het vreedsaam gelyk, terug by die huis. Dit was een van die hartseerste tye saam met Madiba om te sien hoe hy sy seun begrawe.

In die vroeë jare van 2000 het Madiba Douw Steyn gebel en gevra om te help dink aan maniere hoe om ekstra geld te verdien. Madiba het net ’n pensioen as voormalige president ontvang, maar dit was nie genoeg om sy huise in stand te hou en na sy familie om te sien nie. Ek kon aanvoel dat hy gevoel het hy is daarvoor verantwoordelik om vir almal te sorg. Sy begeerte was altyd om mense te help. En wanneer enigiemand iets nodig gehad het, het hulle by Madiba kom aanklop. Selfs briewe wat hy tydens sy jare in die tronk geskryf het, dui daarop dat hy altyd wou voorsien. Hierdie briewe is in *Conversations with Myself* opgeneem.

In daardie dae het Ismail Ayob, Madiba se prokureur, al sy finansies behartig. Madiba het nooit self met geld gewerk nie en sou eenvoudig een van sy prokureurs vra om namens hom op te tree. Die wêreld het verander terwyl hy in die tronk was en hy het nie geweet hoe om die tegnologie te gebruik wat ’n mens deesdae vir jou bankdienste inspan nie.

Madiba het die vermoë gehad om mense sonder voorbehoud te vertrou. Ek het Ismail in die presidensie leer ken en wanneer Madiba ook al iets nodig gehad het wat geld sou vereis, is Ismail gebel. Ismail het sy verantwoordelikhede baie ernstig opgeneem. Hy was ook in beheer van al Madiba se intellektuele eiendom en die gebruik van sy

beeld. Wanneer iemand Madiba geld belowe het vir projekte van watter aard ook al, moes dit in die bank inbetaal word voordat daar met besprekings begin is. Madiba het nooit hierdie sake self behartig nie en sover ek weet, het hy die helfte van die tyd nie geweet wat Ismail namens hom onderhandel het nie. Maar Ismail was 'n sterk onderhandelaar.

Wanneer iemand geld nodig gehad het, het Madiba hulle ook na Ismail toe gestuur. Maar hy sou Ismail eers bel en vir hom sê hoe hy die saak moes hanteer. Baie keer sou Ismail die onkoste bevraagteken. Dit het mense geïrriteer en volgens my ervaring het niemand 'n goeie verhouding met hom gehad nie. Vroeër of later sou almal sê Ismail moet gaan. Maar hy het nie. Madiba was ook 'n baie lojale mens en het dus, ongeag ander mense se menings, lojaal teenoor Ismail gebly.

Een van Madiba se ander prokureurs, George Bizos, was dekades lank sy prokureur, nog van voor die tyd toe Madiba Robbeneiland toe gestuur is. Hy was ook 'n lid van die span wat Madiba in die Rivonia-verhoor verteenwoordig het. Hy het gesag afgedwing met sy kennis en ervaring van die reg. Hy was ook een van die min mense wat 'n spesiale vriendskap met Madiba gedeel het en iemand van wie Madiba baie gehou het.

Douw Steyn het teruggekom na Madiba met 'n plan om sy inkomste te vergroot sodat hy sy familie kon onderhou. Die voorstelle sou egter vereis dat sy beeld tot 'n mate gekommersialiseer moes word. Sy prokureurs het na die voorstelle gekyk en almal was daarteen gekant. Dit sou dit baie moeilik maak om die onwettige gebruik van daardie beeld te beheer en daarom is Douw se plan van die hand gewys. Maar sy bedoeling was goed. Ons was altyd konsekwent en het by Madiba se wens gehou dat sy beeld nie kommersieel uitgebuit moes word nie. Ná sy presidentskap het die Nelson Mandela-stigting dit behartig.

Oor die jare heen is ons geld vir baie goed aangebied, maar daar was 'n paar ongeskrewe reëls waaroor almal onversetlik was, ongeag die hoeveelheid geld wat ter sprake was.

Daar was net 'n paar dinge waaroor Madiba heeltemal onbuigsaam was. Om sy vriendskap met die koningin in die gedrang te bring was een van hulle. 'n Ander was om nie met alkolhol of tabak geassosieer te word nie en om nooit sy tyd te verkoop nie. By een geleentheid het 'n baie bekende alkoholdistilleerder ons twee miljoen dollar aangebied

sonder om enigiets terug te verwag. Maar Nelson Mandela die filantroop het nie hierby ingepas nie en ons het dit van die hand gewys. Die Suid-Afrikaanse Brouerye het ook geld aan ons aangebied en Ismail het dit ook van die hand gewys.

In Parys het 'n bekende handelsnaam in weelde-artikels Madiba vyf miljoen dollar aangebied indien hy in 'n advertensie sou verskyn. Hy het van die mense gehou, maar ek het geweet hy sou nooit sy naam kommersieel gebruik nie. Net so sou ons nooit Madiba se tyd verkoop nie. Mense wou betaal om hom te ontmoet en ons het nee gesê. Soms het hulle hom wel ontmoet, maar ons het die geld van die hand gewys. My gevoel was dat die bedoelings nie suiwer kon wees as jy nie in die nalatenskap van Nelson Mandela glo nie en net wou betaal omdat jy voordeel daaruit kon trek. So het ons miljoene oor die jare heen verloor, maar ons het daarin geslaag om die kommersiële uitbuiting van sy nalatenskap te vermy. Of ek moet eerder sê ons het probeer, en die meeste van die tyd was ons suksesvol. Dit het nie beteken dat ons minder van mense gehou het omdat hulle alkolholprodukte maak of omdat hulle sulke voorstelle gedoen het nie. Mense is soms onbewus van sekere dinge en dit was nie noodwendig 'n weerspieëling van hul integriteit nie. Die meeste beroemde mense en selfs wêreldleiers laat soms toe dat hul beeld vir kommersiële doeleindes gebruik word, hetsy advertensies of deur iets te laat opveil, of deur mense te laat betaal om saam met hulle middagete of aandete te geniet of 'n ander ervaring met hulle te deel. 'n Mens kan op dié manier geld maak, maar dit sal nie deug vir iemand met die morele verantwoordelikhede van Nelson Mandela nie.

In dié geval sou hy persoonlik daaruit munt slaan om sy familie te help onderhou en dit het dinge meer gekompliseerd gemaak. Ismail het 'n paar dae na Douw se voorstel met 'n ander idee na Madiba gekom, naamlik dat hy kunswerke moes skep met afdrukke van tekeninge wat iemand hom sou wys om te maak, en daarna moes hy dit almal onderteken en sou dit dan verkoop word. Soos Madiba ouer geword het, het hy die mense om hom al hoe meer daaraan herinner dat hy 'n groot familie het waarna hy moes omsien, want hy wou die dringendheid van sy situasie vir ons beklemtoon. Hy het geld ingesamel vir 'n opvoedingstrust omdat hy daarop aangedring het dat sy kleinkinders 'n goeie opvoeding moes kry. Daar was niks vreemds

hieromtrent nie. Mense het verstaan dat hy lank in die tronk was en dat hy sy familie moes ondersteun op 'n manier wat vir sy afwesigheid sou vergoed.

Ismail se voorstel is aanvaar en kort daarna het hy namens Madiba 'n transaksie met die sakeman Ross Calder aangegaan. Hulle het 'n kunstenaar na Madiba se huis gebring wat hom gehelp het om 'n paar tekeninge in te kleur en 'n paar houtskoolsketse te maak. Die inisiatief was gegrond op 'n ander projek wat deur wêreldbekendes gedoen is, amateurkuns wat vir hulle baie geld sou verdien. Die eerste fase is voltooi en afdrukke is daarvan gemaak. In die tweede fase moes Madiba duisende van hierdie afdrukke onderteken. Ek moes hierdie tekensessies reël. So elke paar dae sou Madiba gaan sit en vir 'n uur of twee net sketse onderteken – honderde of selfs duisende van hulle, ek weet nie. Baie mense het Ismail se motiewe verdag gevind, maar ek het geen rede gehad om hom te bevraagteken of dop te hou nie. Aangesien Madiba hom geheel en al vertrou het, was ek nie daar wanneer hierdie sketse onderteken is nie. Soms het hy dit by die huis gedoen en soms op kantoor. Niemand het enige rekord daarvan gehou nie en daar was geen rede om die oortuiging waarmee hierdie projek onderneem is te bevraagteken nie. Madiba het immers altyd gesê: 'Moet nooit iemand se integriteit in twyfel trek voordat hy jou rede gee om dit te doen nie.' Boonop was Ismail al van lank voor 1994 in Madiba se diens. Ek het nooit hul verhouding bevraagteken nie en ook nie sy gesag nie. Hulle het 'n geskiedenis saam gehad en ek en hy nie, en dis iets waarop ek gereeld gewys is.

In April 2005 het 'n artikel in die ondersoekende tydskrif *Noseweek* verskyn onder die opskrif 'Burgeroorlog in Madibaland'. Die joernalis het geskryf:

> As 'n mens die burgeroorlog wat in Mandelaland uitgebreek het wil verstaan, sou dit nuttig wees om te dink aan 'n Middeleeuse koninkryk waarin die koning se heerskappy einde se kant toe staan. Die familie en faksies in die familie ding mee om posisies vir die dag wanneer die koning nie meer daar sal wees nie. Die hof van die koning is vol komplotte en fluisteringe.

Die middelpunt van hierdie 'burgeroorlog' was die vraag: Wie sou in die toekoms Madiba se inkomste beheer en, belangriker, die lisensie wat sy handelsmerk, sy naam en sy beeld verteenwoordig. Madiba wou objektiewe mense soos sy prokureurs George Bizos, Bally Chuene en Wim Trengove in beheer hiervan hê en nie sy familie nie. Hy was ook teleurgesteld in Ismail se optrede. Iemand het 'n saadjie in Madiba

se kop geplant dat Ismail verslag moes doen oor die vordering en toe Madiba sy optrede begin bevraagteken en oor die projek begin uitvra, het hul verhouding na my mening hierna agteruitgegaan. Madiba het beswaar aangeteken. Hy het gevoel alles is nie pluis nie en het Bizos en ander opdrag gegee om die projek te staak. Ismail en Calder is deur die hof beveel om die verkope van die kunswerke te staak. Diegene wat uit die projek voordeel sou trek, was kwaad en ’n oorlog het uitgebreek.

In die mees onlangse hofstryd het Ismail en twee van Madiba se dogters, Makaziwe en Zenani, in 2013 dagvaardings aan Bally Chuene laat beteken waarvolgens sy aanstelling en dié van Bizos en Tokyo Sexwale in die trust wat die inkomste van die kunswerke beheer, onwettig sou wees. Die saak is in September 2013 teruggetrek.

Ons was nou gereeld op Shambala. Dit het nie net aan Madiba die ideale ruimte gebied waar hy kon skryf nie, maar ook die vrede en stilte verskaf wat hy so nodig gehad het. Madiba het gereeld gesê hy verlang na die tronk. Dit het my verbaas en verontrus. Hy het dan verduidelik dat hy in die tronk tyd gehad het om te lees en te dink. Ek het verstaan wat hy bedoel. Hy sou daarop aandring om weke lank na Shambala te gaan en hy wou graag sy memoires klaar skryf. Dit was ’n lang en uitmergelende proses. Hy sou elke bladsy met die hand skryf en na elke vyf bladsye of so dit vir my gee om oor te tik en dan die feite op die getikte bladsye korrigeer. Hy het dan nie die bladsye met die korreksies aan my terugbesorg om dit te verander nie en hy sou dan daarop aandring om die hele bladsy met die hand oor te skryf. Ek het al probeer om met my skootrekenaar langs hom te sit terwyl hy praat. Hy het geweier. Hy het nie van tegnologie gehou nie en wou self pen op papier sit. Ek het selfs voorgestel dat hy sy gedagtes opneem en dat ek dit dan terugspeel en tik, maar hy het gesê: ‘Nee, jy weet, ek sal nie daarvan hou nie.’ Ons het ook ’n navorser aangestel, maar die skryfwerk was eenvoudig te veel vir hom.

Uittreksels van die manuskrip verskyn in *Conversations with Myself* en hopelik sal die ongepubliseerde dele gebruik word in die opvolg van *Long Walk to Freedom*, wat net oor Madiba se jare as president handel.

Die feit van die saak was dat ons stadig begin het om rem aan te draai. En tog het Madiba in Mei 2005 op sy laaste besoek aan die VSA

vertrek. Ons eerste stilhouplek was New York. Die voormalige voorsitter van Goldman Sachs het ’n geldinsamelingsgeleentheid gereël en Madiba sou ’n ete bywoon. Mevrou Machel was nie saam met ons in New York nie en Madiba was knorrig omdat hy ongemaklik was sonder haar. Toe ek hom uit sy middagslapie wakker maak het hy gesê hy voel nie lekker nie. My hart wou gaan staan. Ek het die dokter gebel. Hy kon geen teken van ernstige siekte vind nie en dit was waarskynlik uitputting. Ons het saamgestem dat ons die vernaamste skenker na sy kamer sou bring om hom te groet, maar dat hy nie die dinee sou bywoon nie. Ons was almal senuweeagtig oor mense se reaksie wanneer ons besluit het om enigiets af te stel.

Die borge het baie begrip vir ons situasie gehad en ek wens almal was so tegemoetkomend. Die volgende dag was Madiba weer perdfris. Hy het opgestaan vir sy vergadering met president Bill Clinton en was soos altyd bly om hom te sien. Dit was ook ’n dag nader aan mevrou Machel se aankoms en dit het hom altyd laat ophelder. Drie aande later was ons by ’n ete waar Sol Kerzner en Robert de Niro die gashere was en wat deur Jerry Inzerillo in Tribeca gereël is. Dit was ’n wonderlike geleentheid met baie goeie vriende en beroemdes uit die musiek- en vermaaklikheidswêreld. Die helfte van hulle het ek nie geken nie. Hulle het heeltyd om sy tafel gedraai om hom te groet en ons moes bontstaan om die mense van hom weg te hou. Ek moes Madiba ‘opdrag gee’ om te eet sodat hy stamina kon opbou. Hy het nie die vaagste benul gehad wie die meeste van die beroemdes was nie. Hy het ’n paar name herken deurdat hy in die koerant van hulle gelees het, maar die meeste van hulle was vir hom vreemdelinge. Ek dink dit moes nogal ’n skok vir hulle gewees het, aangesien hy selde oorstelp gelyk het wanneer hy hulle ontmoet het – anders as hulle bewonderaars. Dit was op sigself vermaaklik. Hulle sou na sy tafel toe stroom. Toe ons uitstap, was Richard Gere een van die mans by wie ons stilgestaan het om hom te groet. Ek het na Madiba gekyk toe hulle aan mekaar voorgestel is en gewonder of hy weet hoeveel vroue in die wêreld plekke met hom sou wou ruil. Hy het geen idee hiervan gehad nie en ek dink hy kon op my gesig sien ek was verstom.

Dit het my herinner aan ’n ander geleentheid toe ons Ierland toe gereis het om die Spesiale Olimpiese Spele te ondersteun. Net toe ons in die hysbak wou klim, het ek ’n man inderhaas om die hoek sien

kom. Hy wou die hysbak haal. Hy het nie geweet wie binne sou wees nie. Ek het gesien dis Pierce Brosnan wat aangehardloop kom. Ek het vir Madiba gefluister die man wat nou by die hysbak gaan inkom is 'n beroemde akteur, hy speel 007 in die James Bond-flieks. Ek moes ophou praat na 'beroemde akteur' en ek was oorbluf dat hy nie 'n gevolg by hom gehad het nie en toe hy by die hysbak instap, sê Madiba: 'Wie speel wie?'

Ek het nie geantwoord nie en net gesê: 'Khulu, u onthou die beroemde akteur Pierce Brosnan?'

En Madiba het gesê: 'O ja, bly te kenne.' Ek was verlig toe die hysbak stop by die verdieping waar ons wou wees en ons kon uitklim. Brosnan het ons hoflik gegroet.

Iets soortgelyks het gebeur toe Brad Pitt Suid-Afrika besoek het ter ondersteuning van die Mineseeker-projek, 'n inisiatief wat deur sir Richard Branson begin is om landmyne op te spoor en te verwoes in plekke wat vroeër deur oorlog geteister is. Nelson Mandela se lewe het om politiek gedraai, nie vermaak nie. Behalwe vir die paar rolprente wat hulle in die tronk gesien het, het hy letterlik nie tyd gehad om flieks te kyk nie. En daar was niks ontspanne in sy lewe nie. Hy sou byvoorbeeld nie kon agteroor sit en 'n DVD kyk nie. Hy het vir politiek en sy filantropiese projekte geleef, geëet en geslaap. Ek het aan hom probeer verduidelik wie Brad Pitt is, maar dit was moeilik. Toe hulle uiteindelik die volgende dag ontmoet, het Madiba gevra (soos hy altyd maak) of Brad vir hom 'n visitekaartjie het. Natuurlik het hy nie een gehad nie. Madiba het gevra: 'So, wat doen jy?' Ek het gelukkig vooraf aan Brad verduidelik dat Madiba nie weet wat in Hollywood en die rolprentbedryf aangaan nie.

Brad het goedgunstiglik geantwoord: 'Ek probeer 'n bestaan maak deur 'n akteur te wees.'

En ek het gesê: 'Hy is baie beskeie; hy is een van die beste akteurs in die wêreld.' Brad het nie 'n bohaai oor enigiets gemaak nie en hy was nie verbaas of verleë nie. 'n Ware heer.

Die aand voor sy besoek het ek 'n oproep van 'n gemeenskaplike vriend ontvang wat ook by die Mineseeker-projek betrokke was. Hy het gesê Brad wou hê ek moet by hulle aansluit vir ete. Ek het dit eers van die hand gewys. Ek het vir 'n kollega daarvan vertel en sy het gewonder of al my varkies op hok is en gevra: 'Wie op aarde sê nee

dankie vir 'n ete saam met Brad Pitt?' Wel, ek het. Ek was bewus van die feit dat die ete veronderstel was om hom 'n oorsig van Suid-Afrika te gee en dat hy wou weet wat hy van sy vergadering met Madiba kon verwag. Ek het genoeg gehad van etes en aande waar ek oor my baas moes praat. Hoe lief ek ook al vir Madiba was, wou ek nie verplig voel om mense met hom te vermaak nie. Ek is gevra om weer oor die uitnodiging na te dink. Ek het gegaan en ek is bly ek het. Brad was 'n ongelooflik vriendelike, nederige mens en ons deel 'n voorliefde vir motorfietse; ons het selfs agtergekom ons het in daardie stadium dieselfde soort fiets besit. Hy wou nie net oor Madiba hoor nie, maar het regtig belang gestel in mense wat hom 'n idee kon gee van Suid-Afrika en die land se toekoms.

Ons Amerikaanse reis is na ons besoek aan New York voortgesit. Dié keer het president George W. Bush wel ons oproep beantwoord en Madiba is Washington toe om hom te ontmoet. Vir die eerste keer het ons in die Four Seasons-hotel in Georgetown gebly en hulle het die skuilname meneer en mevrou Smith vir Madiba en mevrou Machel gebruik. Ek het gedink dis heel ironies. In Suid-Afrika word Smith as 'n 'wit' van beskou. Kort tevore is daar 'n rolprent uitgereik met die titel *Mr and Mrs Smith*, oor twee spioene wat verlief raak, met Angelina Jolie en Brad Pitt in die hoofrolle. Daar was altyd hierdie oomblikke wat humor aan selfs die stresvolste situasies verleen het. My humorsin het my ook gehelp omdat ek in stilte kon lag, wat gekeer het dat ek van my kop af raak.

Terwyl ons in Washington was, het Madiba die Congressional Black Caucus toegespreek. Ons kon nie enige van die betrokkenes ontmoet nie omdat dit 'n groot groep was en ons wou nie party mense bevoordeel en ander aanstoot gee nie. By die hotel, na Madiba se toespraak, het ek verneem Barack Obama, wat toe 'n senator was, het nie die koukus bygewoon nie omdat hy oor 'n spesifike saak van hulle verskil het. Daar was ook 'n versoek van senator Hillary Clinton om Madiba te sien en as gevolg van ons verhouding met die Clintons deur die jare, en omdat ons geweet het dit sou meer 'n sosiale ontmoeting wees as politiek of sake, het ons ingestem, al was Madiba teen dié tyd doodmoeg na sy besige program in New York. Die langafstandreise was dié keer net te veel vir hom. Hy moes nog vir president Bush ontmoet en ons moes enige reserwe-energie wat hy gehad het, spaar.

Ons het ook ’n boodskap ontvang dat senator Obama Madiba wou ontmoet. John Samuel, ons uitvoerende hoof, professor Gerwel en ek het saamgestem dat ons dit van die hand moet wys. Madiba was eenvoudig net te moeg.

’n Amerikaanse vriend van baie jare, Frank Ferrari, het gesê senator Obama wou net Madiba se hand skud en dat hy die eerste swart Amerikaanse president in die toekoms kon wees en ek het in stilte gedink ja, ja, ek is seker. Uiteindelik het ons tog ingestem en hulle het ontmoet en vlugtig oor ditjies en datjies gepraat. Obama het ’n bietjie oorboord gegaan met sy eerbiedigheid teenoor die bejaarde Madiba en dit het my opgeval hoeveel aandag hy aan almal skenk, van die deurwagte tot die ‘sekretaresse’. Dis iets wat hy met Madiba in gemeen gehad het. Die klein mensies maak vir hulle saak, wat altyd vir ’n mens iets sê van die grootsheid van enige man. Madiba het nie eens uit sy stoel opgestaan om sy hand te skud nie. Hy was net te moeg. Ek kan nie onthou wie die foto geneem het nie, maar daarop sien ’n mens net vir Madiba in sy stoel en ’n silhoeët van senator Obama wat vooroor buk om sy hand te skud.

Dit was die eerste keer dat ons president Bush sou sien nadat Madiba verklaar het dat Amerika verkeerd was om Irak binne te val en dat die Britse premier, Tony Blair, opgetree het asof hy Amerika se minister van buitelandse sake was. Eina! Hy het ook gesê president Bush steur hom nie aan die Verenigde Nasies nie omdat Kofi Annan swart is. Dubbel eina! Daar was ’n paar sake waaroor Madiba met president Bush wou praat en die plan was dat hulle na hul ontmoeting saam voor die media sou verskyn om te wys daar is nie onmin tussen hulle nie, al verskil hulle oor sekere vraagstukke. Dit was die boodskap wat hulle aan die wêreld sou uitdra. Madiba het gereeld gesê ’n mens moet nooit jou verskille verberg nie, maar jy moet ook altyd onthou dat daar wel verskille is wat nie noodwendig die res van die verhouding nadelig beïnvloed nie. Net so het hy meningsverskille met Ghadaffi gehad, maar hom nooit op grond daarvan afgeskryf nie.

Ek was bekommerd dat Madiba te moeg was of eenvoudig te broos vir ’n ontmoeting van hierdie aard. Ek het dus vir hom ’n paar punte neergeskryf waarop hy kon let. Ons is soos voorheen by die Withuis in en toe na die sogenaamde Oval Office. Ons is toe na ’n wagkamer waar ’n werknemer probeer het om kletspraatjies met Madiba te

maak. Mense kan gewoonlik my emosies op my gesig lees en hy het vinnig die boodskap gekry. Die president was dadelik beskikbaar en die vergadering het begin. Ek het die stiptelikheid waardeer. Ek het eers gedink hy is vriendelik, maar toe Madiba sy standpunt ’n derde keer herhaal, het ek gesien president Bush raak ongeduldig. Madiba het nie by die punte gehou wat ek neergeskryf het nie, maar by ’n onderwerp vasgehaak en dieselfde ding herhaal. Ek het senuweeagtig begin raak en kon sien president Bush het nie begrip gehad vir die beperkinge wat Madiba se ouderdom op hom geplaas het nie. Voor Madiba kon klaar praat, het president Bush hom in die rede geval en gesê: ‘Wel, Meneer die President, dis tyd vir ons om met die media te gaan praat.’ Madiba wou nie ophou nie, want hy was nog nie klaar nie. Die president het hom weer in die rede geval en sy versoek herhaal. Ek was omgekrap.

Vir my het dit gelyk asof dit vir president Bush belangriker was om voor die media te verskyn as om te luister wat Madiba probeer sê. Tot sy krediet het hy ingestem om hulp in Afrika te vergroot, maar dit het nie my standpunt oor die dag se gebeure verander nie. Ek het magteloos gevoel en jammer vir Madiba omdat ek onder daardie omstandighede niks kon doen om hom te ondersteun nie. Maar hy het met trots opgetree en selfs agtergekom dat hy besig was om dinge te vergeet en dat sy gedagtes soms hul eie koers gekies het. Hy sou gereeld sê: ‘Jy moet weet, ek is al amper honderd jaar oud, daar is dinge wat ek vergeet.’ En my hart sou na hom uitgaan, maar soms sou ek sy hand net ’n drukkie gee of aan sy skouer raak om te probeer wys dat ons verstaan en dat ons daar was om hom te ondersteun al was hy vergeetagtig.

Ek het destyds in Johannesburg aan die Wes-Rand gewoon, omtrent een-en-twintig kilometer van ons kantoor en Madiba se huis in Houghton af. In normale verkeer het dit my omtrent vyf-en-veertig minute geneem om soontoe of terug te ry. In spitsverkeer het dit my omtrent twee uur geneem. Dit was sieldodend. En dan sou Madiba my nog oor enigiets bel. Op ’n Saterdagoggend terwyl ek in die tuin werk, sou hy my skakel en vra: ‘Zeldina, is jy besig?’

Natuurlik sou ek nooit sê ek is besig nie en eerder vra: ‘Hoe kan ek help, Khulu?’

Hy sou my dan oortuig dis iets wat hy nie oor die foon kan bespreek nie en vra of ek na sy huis kan oorkom. Dan het ek maar gewas, aangetrek en Houghton toe gery. En wanneer ek daar aankom, het hy nege uit tien keer al vergeet hoekom hy gebel het.

Ek het hom sover probeer kry om alles neer te skryf waaraan hy dink sodat hy kon onthou wanneer ek daar kom, maar hy het dit nie gedoen nie. Toe het ek hom probeer oorreed om vir een van die personeellede by die huis te sê waaroor dit gaan sodat ek hom kon herinner wanneer ek daar aankom. Maar hy wou dit ook nie doen nie. Ek moes ’n ander plan maak. Ek moes ’n huis nader aan syne begin soek. Ek het in daardie tyd my eerste motorfiets gekoop en my pa het my oortuig dat ek moet grootword, my speelgoed moet verkoop en in eiendom belê. Toe het ek ’n huis baie nader aan Madiba en die kantoor gekoop.

Maar ek kon eenvoudig nie teen dieselfde pas voortgaan waarteen ons gewerk en gereis het nie en ek moes ook na myself omsien. Die administrasie het my oorweldig en elke dag wat ek van die kantoor weg was om geleenthede saam met Madiba by te woon, het die papierwerk opgehoop. Gelukkig het die stigting se uitvoerende hoof toe die aanstelling van drie assistente goedgekeur. Hulle was engele uit die hemel. Die ekstra hande het my gehelp en ek het daarin geslaag om party van my pligte aan hulle oor te dra sodat ek tyd kon skep om Madiba se sake beter te beplan, alles van mediakommunikasie tot tydsbestuur. Maar niks het ooit volgens plan verloop nie. Madiba wou elke sekonde van die dag by my weet wat van hom verwag word. Dit het nie saak gemaak hoe goed ek enigiets beplan het en hoeveel aandag ek aan detail bestee het nie, daar het altyd iets ingesluip. Mense het al vir my gesê ek is ’n slawedrywer en dis nie maklik om met my saam te werk nie. Ek is ’n perfeksionis en my verwagtinge van ander is soms te hoog. Soos Madiba ouer geword het, het ek koppiger oor fyner puntjies om hom begin raak, maar vreemd genoeg het ek terselfdertyd meer geduldig met ander geraak.

En soms was Madiba moeilik. As ek nie genoeg aandag aan hom geskenk het of nie genoeg geleenthede na sy sin saam met hom bygewoon het nie, sou hy ’n rede vind waarom ek iets eerder self moet doen as om dit aan enigiemand anders oor te laat. En dan is ek vasgevang tussen die personeel wie se gevoelens ek nie wou seermaak

nie. Ek wou ook nie hê hulle moes oorbodig voel nie. Ek was nie meer hierdie skaam, bang wit meisie nie en hy was gewoond aan my obsessief-kompulsiewe gedrag en my perfeksionisme. Dit het hom gepas. Hy sou heelwat traagheid van ander mense verduur, maar nie van my nie.

In Oktober 2005 is ons twee weke lank Kenia toe om tyd saam met mevrou Machel deur te bring terwyl sy besig was om aan die Afrikaportuuroorsig-meganisme in Nairobi te werk. Dit was seker die langste twee weke van my lewe. Tuis het ’n vriendin my huis vir my opgepak en in Kenia was daar net een ding wat ek wou doen, en dit is huis toe gaan. Madiba het minder gepraat, maar tog was hy nooit die soort mens wat lank ledig kon rondsit nie. Hy was ook gefrustreerd, maar dit was ’n ‘Catch 22’-situasie. Hy wou by sy vrou wees, maar hy wou nie in een plek vasgehok voel nie.

Ons het eers in ’n hotel in Nairobi tuisgegaan wat lieflik omring was deur groen blaarryke bome, maar dit het gekeer dat sonlig by sy kamer inskyn. Aangesien Madiba nie vrylik kon rondbeweeg sonder dat mense hom oorweldig het nie, het ons die meeste van die tyd binne gebly. Na ’n paar dae het ons besluit om na ’n gholflandgoed toe te skuif waar daar ten minste ’n bietjie sonlig was en waar hy buite kon sit. Maar daar was nie veel om te doen behalwe om die koerantuitknipsels te lees wat hy van die huis af gekry het en om ’n paar besoekers te ontvang nie. Oorkant Madiba se kamer was ’n meer wat deur bosse en bome omring is. My verbeelding gaan op loop wanneer daar niks is om te doen nie en ek het my verbeel hierdie meer lyk soos Loch Ness. Dit was vreemd en spookagtig. Ek het vir Madiba gesê ek dink dis Loch Ness en hom van die Skotse mite van die monster in die meer vertel. ’n Paar dae later het ek na die meer as Loch Ness verwys toe mevrou Machel tuis was vir middagete. Sy het vir my gesê ek moet ophou, want ek maak Madiba bang. Ek Madiba bang maak? Ons het gelag.

Met die hulp van my vriendin kon ek gou na my tuiskoms trek. Ek het toe besluit dis tyd vir ’n bietjie normaliteit en aangesien ek nog altyd ’n hondemens was, het ek besluit ek gaan vir my twee klein hondjies kry. My Bostonse terriërs het by die huis aangekom. Hul name was Winston en Roxy. Ek het veel vroeër besluit ek sal nooit honde met gewone name hê nie. Hulle verteenwoordig beroemde

politieke figure. Winston het op 'n haar na soos Winston Churchill gelyk en het net 'n sigaar nodig gehad om die prentjie te voltooi. Roxy was 'n opgetofde dame en het na geen politieke karakter gelyk nie. Maar as ek nou daaraan terugdink, kon ek haar Christina genoem het (na Christina Onassis), of Madeleine (na Madeleine Allbright) eerder as Roxy. Maar Roxy het haar ook gepas. Hulle was gou my kinders en aangesien Madiba nie meer so graag wou reis nie, was dit makliker vir my om aan my troeteldiere die aandag te skenk wat hulle verdien het.

Madiba het selfs meer tyd in Maputo deurgebring as voorheen, maar sy skryfwerk laat vaar. Tuis wou hy nog steeds interessante mense ontmoet, en na afloop van die Suid-Afrikaanse *Idols*-kompetisie het hy daarvan in die koerant gelees en aankondig dat hy die jong sangers wou ontmoet en ons het dit gereël. Toe is 'n polisieman elf keer geskiet terwyl hy aan diens was en het wonderbaarlik oorleef. Madiba het daaroor in die koerant gelees en hy wou hom sien. Party dae sou hy sê hy wil mense ontmoet en wanneer hulle dan opdaag het hy eenvoudig nie die krag gehad vir vreemdelinge nie. Dit het al hoe moeiliker geword om te voorspel wat hy wou hê en dit was duidelik dat hy meer begrip en geduld van ons sou verlang. Dis 'n natuurlike proses en deel van oudword. Soos die jare aanstap, verander 'n mens meer gereeld van plan.

Hierna het alles begin kalmeer. Madiba was die meeste van die tyd in Maputo saam met sy vrou en sou net Suid-Afrika toe kom wanneer hy belangrike geleenthede moes bywoon. Mevrou Machel moes aangaan met haar werk. Omdat sy so dinamies is, kon sy nie haar werk opsy skuif nie en gevolglik het ons die meeste van die tyd by die huis deurgebring en verveeld geraak. Na my mening is een van die karaktertrekke wat Madiba aantreklik gevind het omtrent mevrou Machel die feit dat sy so dinamies en passievol is; dat sy hierdie vasbeslotenheid en toegewydheid gehad het om nie net in Mosambiek verandering teweeg te bring nie, maar ook oor die hele Afrika, wat daarop neerkom dat sy die wêreld help verander het. Sy het ambisie gehad en hoewel Madiba tyd saam met haar wou deurbring, het hy nooit van haar verwag om enigiets prys te gee wat eie aan haarself was nie. Sy het 'n passie vir kinders en wil die lot van haar eie mense in Mosambiek verbeter. Sy het in 1995 die Nansenmedalje van die Verenigde Nasies verwerf uit erkenning vir haar werk met

vlugtelingkinders en sy was vasbeslote om daardie agenda voort te sit; om 'n stem vir die stemloses te wees. Dis iets wat Madiba waardeer en bewonder het en waaroor hy baie gespog het wanneer sy nie by was nie.

In Januarie 2006 is ons weer op uitnodiging van Sol Kerzner Mauritius toe. Hierdie keer het ons seker gemaak Madiba se dagboek was skoon en dat hy tien dae kon bly pleks van 'n week. Dit was net so lekker soos die eerste keer. Soos altyd het Jerry Inzerillo van Kerzner International seker gemaak daar word omgesien na alles wat ons nodig het, soos wat Sol versoek het. Dieselfde bestuurder as vroeër, Mauro Governato, was in beheer van sake en het absoluut alles in sy vermoë gedoen om seker te maak dat Madiba sy tydjie daar geniet. Ons het algehele privaatheid geniet en het vernuwe na Suid-Afrika teruggekeer, reg om nog 'n jaar aan te durf.

Ek het 'n jong inwoner van Mauritius met die naam Prakash Ramsurrun in die gimnasium ontmoet wat beweer het hy is opgelei in biokinetika. Toe hy navraag doen of Madiba die gimnasium sou besoek, het ek vir hom gesê Madiba kon nie meer stap sonder hulp of sy kierie nie. Prakash het my uitgedaag en gesê as hy strekoefeninge saam met Madiba kon doen, sou hy my verseker dat hy met die hulp van weerstandsoefeninge weer sonder 'n kierie sou kon loop. Ek was gewoonlik baie geïrriteerd wanneer mense sulke voorstelle maak. Madiba het die permanente diens van 'n mediese dokter tot sy beskikking gehad en in my eie frustrasie het ek gedink mense onderskat die sorg wat hulle hom bied. Het hulle dan gedink ons het nie reeds hierdie dinge ondersoek voordat hulle ons nader nie? Die dokters wou nooit na hierdie voorstelle luister nie, en dus moes ek. En ek moes verskonings uitdink oor hoekom dit nie sou werk nie of hoekom dit nie sou plaasvind nie.

Ek het Prakash se voorstel met Madiba en Mum bespreek en hulle het ingestem dat hy kon kom om strekoefeninge te demonstreer. Die volgende oggend het Prakash met Madiba begin werk. Natuurlik moes hy eers die oefeninge op my demonstreer voordat Madiba dit kon goedkeur. Voor ons ons oë uitvee, het Madiba met die program begin en met Prakash saamgewerk. Teen die tyd dat ons vertrek het, kon hy sonder hulp en sonder sy kierie stap. Hy het stralend gelyk. Ek het 'n briefie geskryf om Sol vir sy gasvryheid te bedank en gesê sy

vrygewigheid het jare by Madiba se lewe gevoeg, wat ek regtig geglo het. Ons het Prakash Suid-Afrika toe gebring sodat hy ons masseuse kon wys wat om te doen, maar dit het vasbeslotenheid en hardnekkige pogings geverg om Madiba te laat voortgaan met die oefeninge. Dis nie iets waarvoor hy altyd oop was nie. Dus was hy ’n paar maande later terug op die kierie.

Tuis het Madiba meer tyd in die sitkamer deurgebring en hy het eendag aangekondig dat dit tyd was om ontslae te raak van die koloniale kunswerke wat daar hang. Mevrou Machel het my gevra om Afrikakuns te soek. Ek het die vorige jaar soortgelyke kuns vir my nuwe huis gekoop; skilderye van ’n Xhosa-vrou. Ek is terug na daardie winkel toe en het die eienaar gevra om vir Madiba Afrikakuns te kom wys. Aanvanklik het hy baie van ’n skildery met drie Xhosa-vroue gehou. Dit was kleurryk en helder. Net twee weke later het hy gesê hy hou nie meer daarvan nie. ‘Nee, jy sien, hierdie kan nie reg wees nie, die skildery wys net vroue, daar moet ’n man ook wees.’ ’n Man moes bykom. Die skildery is aan die kunstenaar teruggegee en hy het ’n man bygevoeg. Ek het verstaan dat Madiba se gedagtes geprogrammeer was sodat alles verteenwoordigend en in elke moontlike opsig gebalanseerd moes wees. Dit was nie meer ’n bewustelike besluit wat hy geneem het nie, maar deel van sy weefsel. ’n Natuurlike reaksie. Daar moes ruimte vir almal wees en alles moes ewewigtig wees.

Wanneer jy so iets elke dag sien, word jy self ’n bietjie meer so. Saam met iemand soos Madiba verander alles omtrent jou. Dis inderdaad soos hulle sê: Wees gaaf met elke mens wat jy ontmoet, want jy ken nie hulle stryd nie. Ek het geleer om vreemdelinge meer te waardeer en ordentlik dankie te sê en om altyd eerbiedig te probeer wees en te onthou dat die manier waarop jy iemand benader sal bepaal hoe hulle jou behandel – een van die groot lesse wat ek by Madiba geleer het. Deur hom oor die jare dop te hou, het ek besef hoe waar hierdie stelling is: ‘Mense sal vergeet wat jy gesê het, maar hulle sal nooit vergeet hoe jy hulle laat voel het nie.’ Deur net vriendelik te groet en eerbiedig te wees, het ek gesien hoe waar dit is.

President Bill Clinton het Suid-Afrika gereeld besoek. In 2007 het hy ingestem om deel te neem aan ’n geldinsameling vir die Nelson

Mandela-stigting. Dit was een van die geleenthede waar ek party van ons vriende gebel en gevra het om hieraan deel te neem, en hulle het ingestem. President Clinton en die stigting het gedenkwaardighede geskenk wat opgeveil kon word. Ons het op 'n enkele aand 'n ongelooflike R18 miljoen ingesamel by 'n geleentheid wat deur minder as honderd mense bygewoon is. So iets was ongekend in Suid-Afrika. Die bedrag is by die stigting se uitkeerfonds gevoeg om die volhoubaarheid daarvan te verseker.

Ongelukkig was die Nelson Mandela-stigting die enigste van die drie Mandela-liefdadigheidsfondse wat nie kon uitkeer nie. Ons moes gereeld ons inkomste met die ander liefdadigheidsfondse deel en die fokus daarvan, kinders en beurse, is iets wat maklik welwillendheid inspireer. Ek is nooit enigiets ekstra betaal vir die geldinsamelingswerk waarby ek betrokke geraak het nie. Dit was nooit deel van my posbeskrywing om geldinsamelings of geleenthede te reël nie, maar dis iets wat ek van myself verwag het. Ek het so sterk geglo dat dit noodsaaklik was om Madiba se nalatenskap te bewaar vir die mense en generasies wat sou volg en sodat ons van die man kon leer, selfs wanneer hy weg was, dat ek gedoen het wat ek moontlik kon om seker te maak alles is suksesvol. Tog is dit hartseer dat lede van die familie my sou vra hoe werk dit dat 'n sekretaresse dit of dat doen. Ek kon hulle nie antwoord nie. Ek dink die beste antwoord sou wees: Omdat niemand anders dit gedoen het nie. Ek sal ewig dankbaar bly aan die mense wat daar was wanneer ek hulle nodig gehad het en wat ons ondersteun het, en vir vriendskappe en verhoudings wat ek oor die jare opgebou het.

Tydens 'n besoek van president Clinton aan die stigting die dag voor die geldinsameling, het hy 'n baie roerende toespraak gehou waarin hy die volgende oor Madiba gesê het:

> Ek is bitter spyt, meer as wat ek kan sê, maar ek was nie soos Robert Kennedy in 'n posisie waar ek my daarteen kon uitspreek of iets kon doen terwyl my vriend [Madiba] al daardie jare gely het nie. Maar hy het gelewe, en ek glo God het dit om 'n rede so bestem. En nou, in die prag en bekoorlikheid van sy later jare, hoef hy niks te sê nie. Ons weet 'n mens lyk beter, voel beter en leef beter indien jy glo ons gemeenskaplike menslikheid is belangriker as ons interessante verskille.

Dit het my op elke denkbare manier diep ontroer en dit was een van die beste toesprake wat president Clinton in ons teenwoordigheid gehou het.

Daar het ook 'n vriendskap tussen ons en Gordon Brown en sy

personeel begin ontwikkel. Ons het hom geken as ’n Britse politikus, maar hy het ’n groot passie vir Afrika gehad as kanselier van die tesourie van die Verenigde Koninkryk (die gelyke van ’n minister van finansies) en het hard gewerk om regerings aan te spoor om die sogenaamde millennium-ontwikkelingsdoelwitte te haal. Hy was besig om voor te berei om as premier by Tony Blair oor te neem. Brittanje se betrokkenheid by die oorlog in Irak het Blair se politieke loopbaan geknou. Gordon was ’n baie nederige mens en Madiba het van hom gehou. Die ANC het die Arbeidersparty in Brittanje ondersteun, maar nie terwyl hulle by ’n oorlog betrokke was nie. Gordon wou uit Irak onttrek, maar net soos president Obama het hy ’n baie gekompliseerde situasie van sy voorganger geërf. In Amerika was dit George W. Bush en in Brittanje was dit Tony Blair. Tony was baie sjarmant en daar was bande tussen my en sy kantoorpersoneel ook, maar dit was asof die private en openbare figuur nie met mekaar kon klop nie. In private gesprekke het ek van hom en van sy idees gehou, maar in die openbaar het hy besluite geneem wat daardie mens weerspreek het. Vir my was Gordon die verpersoonliking van ’n welwillende reus. Hy het Mosambiek ook besoek waar hy ’n onderwysprojek saam met Madiba en mevrou Machel geloods het.

’n Paar jaar later wou Shaun Johnson, uitvoerende hoof van die Mandela Rhodes-stigting, hê Madiba moet vir David Cameron op een van ons besoeke aan Londen ontmoet. Hy was die leier van die destydse opposisie in Brittanje, die Konserwatiewe Party. Shaun het ook gesê David kon die volgende premier wees. Ek wou dit nie hardop sê nie, maar ek het gedink ja, ja, asof daar in my leeftyd weer ’n Konserwatiewe premier in Brittanje sou wees, soortgelyk aan my reaksie toe ek die eerste keer gehoor het Barack Obama sou Amerika se eerste swart president word. Al twee het die leiers van hul lande geword, dus is ek bly ons het ingestem om David Cameron ook te ontmoet.

Madiba het steeds teenstrydige seine uitgestuur in verband met sy ‘afgetrede status’. Een voorbeeld was die bekendstelling van The Elders, ’n groep internasionale leiers en meningsvormers wat hulle saam uitspreek oor sake soos vrede en menseregte. Die idee het vroeg in die jare 2000 posgevat tydens ’n ete by die sakereus sir Richard Branson in Londen. Branson en die sanger Peter Gabriel het ’n

organisasie van bejaarde staatsleiers voorgestel wat rigtingwysers kon verskaf in die wêreld se voortgesette stryd om vrede en geregtigheid te bewerkstellig. Hoewel dit ’n briljante gedagte is, was Madiba klaar te oud en moeg om aktief aan so iets deel te neem, maar hy was vasbeslote dat hy dit wou steun. Daar is van die begin af ooreengekom dat hy dit bekend sou stel en dan dadelik opsy sou staan as gevolg van sy aftrede. In beginsel het hy toestemming gegee dat die gedagte met sy steun bekend gestel word en dat die groep broodnodige raad sou verskaf oor wêreldwye aangeleenthede. Die groep sou uit invloedryke en gerespekteerde mense bestaan.

Maar hoe meer dinge verander het, hoe meer het dit dieselfde gebly. Soms sou Madiba ’n paar dae lank by die huis bly en dan aankondig dat hy winkel toe wou gaan om ’n pen te koop. Ek sou dan aanbied om die pen te gaan koop, aangesien ek presies geweet het met watter soort penne hy graag skryf, gewone geel plastiek- Bic-balpuntpenne. Maar dan sou hy vasskop en sê nee, ek gaan met die verkeerde pen terugkom. En ek sou weet hy wou maar net tussen mense wees en dit was die perfekte verskoning om by ’n winkelsentrum uit te kom. Dit was ’n absolute nagmerrie vir my en die veiligheidsmense. Dit was bitter moeilik om hom in en uit by winkelsentrums te kry en ’n mens kon hom nie oorreed om by skryfbehoeftewinkels met ’n straatingang te gaan koop nie. Dit moes ’n winkelsentrum wees. En hy sou terugkeer met sy eenvoudige penne.

Madiba is eenkeer na die Sandton City-winkelsentrum in die buitewyke van Johannesburg. Hy was vasbeslote om ’n pen te koop en die veiligheidsmense het hom na die Montblanc-winkel geneem. En om die een of ander rede het hulle nie geweet ’n Bic-pen sou heeltemal voldoende wees nie. Ek was nie saam met hulle op die betrokke dag nie, maar rustig by die kantoor besig. Hy het ’n pen gekies en toe hy moes betaal, het hy besef hy het nie enige geld by hom nie en nie een van die veiligheidsmense het die bedrag by hulle gehad nie. Selfs al sou hulle al hul geld bymekaar tel, sou hulle nie vir die pen kon betaal nie. Natuurlik nie. Die polisie in Suid-Afrika is van die swaksbetaalde mense en tog word daar van hulle verwag om te ‘beskerm en te dien’.

Hoe dit ook sy, Madiba het nooit regtig geld by hom gedra nie en net af en toe sou hy kontant vra van wie ook al. Maar dan sou hy

vergeet wanneer hy dit aan sy kleinkinders uitgedeel het; gevolglik was sy beursie altyd leeg. Die enigste item wat altyd in sy beursie was, was mevrou Machel se visitekaartjie. Dit was te kosbaar vir woorde. Ek het ’n oproep van die veiligheidsmense ontvang wat gesê het ek moet dringend vir die pen betaal. Ek het toe met die winkeleienaar gepraat en reëlings getref, maar die man het gesê hy sal my later terugbel en vir my ’n rekening stuur.

Montblanc behoort aan die Rupert-familie. Hulle was jare lange vriende van Madiba – eers die pa, doktor Anton Rupert, en later die seun, Johann, wat nou die sakeryk bestuur wat sommige van die suksesvolste vervaardigers van weelde-artikels in die wêreld insluit, soos Cartier, Montblanc en Van Cleef & Arpels. Daar was geen manier waarop Madiba sou onthou het dat Montblanc aan die Ruperts behoort nie en die veiligheidsmense het met goeie bedoelings vir hom ’n pen gaan soek, met die gedagte dat hy daar en dan daarvoor sou kon betaal. Natuurlik sou Johann Rupert nie toelaat dat Madiba vir die pen betaal nie en ons het ’n boodskap ontvang dat die pen ’n geskenk is. Madiba wou dit nie aanvaar nie, maar hy het geen keuse gehad nie en Johann het die stryd gewen. Tot en met sy siekte het Madiba die pen in sy sak gedra en daarna as ‘die presidensiële pen’ verwys. Dit was ’n vulpen wat gereeld volgemaak moes word en gewoonlik nie ink ingehad het nie. Ek het probeer om die gebruik van die pen te vermy omdat dit ’n proses aan die gang sou sit van ink soek, die pen volmaak, en dan sou die pen nie dadelik skryf nie en wat Madiba ook al moes teken, het gewoonlik op ’n morsige gedoente uitgeloop.

Madiba het baie min persoonlike besittings gehad waarop hy heilig was. Sy twee penne, sy horlosie, sy leë beursie, sy ivoorkierie, sy leesbril se kassie en sy gehoorapparate. En dan, die heel belangrikste, sy trouring wat hy altyd gedra het, binne of buite, of hy werk en of hy rus. Hierdie artikels moes elke aand netjies langs sy bed neergesit word. Sodra hy wakker word, sou hy kyk of alles daar was. Wanneer ons op kommersiële vlugte oorsee gereis het, sou hy sy beursie vir my gee om op te pas tot ons land. Hy het gedink dis veiliger by my as by hom al was ek altyd net ’n paar sitplekke weg, nie veiliger of onveiliger as hy nie. En dan was die beursie altyd leeg. By een

geleentheid het sy huispersoneel een van die artikels in sy tas pleks van sy handbagasie gepak en hy het daarop aangedring om dit tydens die vlug by hom te hou. Dit was nie maklik om die kaptein te oorreed om my en die veiligheidsmense toe te laat om ons bagasie in die ruim te vind en die artikel te soek nie, maar Madiba moes dit hê. Hy sou eenvoudig nie tot ruste kom daarsonder nie. Hy was onbuigsaam oor sekere dinge, en hierdie was een daarvan.

Die ander ding wat vir hom heilig was, was sy koerante. Niemand is toegelaat om dit te lees voor hy dit gelees het nie. Hy het nie van koerante gehou wat al oopgemaak was nie. Jy moes die advertensiebrosjures binne uithaal sonder om die koerante oop te maak. Hy sou botweg weier om ’n koerant te neem wat klaar oop was. En dit maak nie saak wat ’n mens doen nie, jy kon nooit aanbied om die koerante vir hom mooi op te vou nadat hy dit klaar gelees het nie. Hy het daarop aangedring om dit self te doen, selfs al het die koningin of ’n lord vir hom gewag. Hy was tydsaam, sorgsaam en sorgvuldig wanneer hy sy koerante en sy kniekombersies gevou het. Ek het tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat dit die weë was van ’n mens wat sewe-en-twintig jaar in isolasie deurgebring het en dat daar geen rede was om dit nou te probeer verander nie. Dis duidelik dat hy tyd gehad het om dinge so sorgvuldig te doen, en so het dit deel van sy daaglikse bestaan geword. Ek het gereeld sy skoene vir hom uitgetrek en hom dan gehelp om sy voete op ’n voetstoeltjie te sit. En behoed my as ek die skoene nie netjies neersit op ’n plek waar hy dit kon sien nie. Moenie dink jy kon dit onder ’n stoel wegsteek of sommer net losweg neersit nie, hy sou jou gou terugroep en vra om dit reg te maak. Dit was deel van die gedissiplineerde mens wat hy was. ‘Zeldina, kom maak net gou hier reg,’ sou hy sê en my vra om die skoene te sit waar hy dit kon sien, netjies langs mekaar en waar dit in dieselfde rigting wys.

Madiba sou gereeld aankondig dat hy ’n boekwinkel wou besoek. Hy het meer boeke gehad as baie biblioteke en ek sou ’n kans waag en hom vra wat hy soek, aangesien ek dit vir hom kon gaan koop sonder dat ons in die openbaar oorweldig word. Hy sou dan net sê hy soek ’n spesifieke boek, en ek het geweet dit help nie ek vra uit oor die titel nie. Of ander kere sou hy eerlik wees en net sê hy wou na boeke gaan kyk. Maar hy het bedoel hy wou mense ook sien. Daar sou in ’n

japtrap chaos in die boekwinkel wees en dan sou die ander kliënte nie meer onthou hoekom hulle in die eerste plek daar was nie, terwyl ek probeer het om hom op titels en afdelings in die boekwinkel te laat fokus sodat ons so gou moontlik kon vertrek. Mense het hom heeltemal oorweldig en ons was baie keer bang dat hulle hom uit liefde sou dooddruk.

Hy sou soms deur ’n boek blaai en as die letters te klein was, sou hy die boek eenkant sit, al was dit vir hom interessant. Hy het meer as een keer gevra dat Naspers, een van die grootste uitgewersmaatskappye, die boeke vir hom in ’n groter lettertipe moes herdruk. Hulle het altyd met graagte ingestem. Natuurlik het Madiba dan ’n hele paar boeke gratis gekry, maar hy het gewoonlik daarop aangedring om daarvoor te betaal en om soos ’n gewone klant behandel te word. Hy het die bestuurders gedreig dat hy sy steun sou onttrek as hulle hom nie laat betaal nie. Daar is mense wat enigiets gratis sal aanvaar, waar hulle dit ook al kan kry, maar nie Nelson Mandela nie. Hy het altyd daarop aangedring om te betaal en het net nou en dan geskenke aanvaar. Soms sou hy een boek koop en ander kere met bokse vol boeke vertrek. Maar ek vermoed hy het baie van hulle nie verder as die eerste bladsy gelees nie.

Hy het ’n groot voorliefde vir Afrikaanse skrywers en biografieë gehad. Een van sy gunstelingboeke was ’n bundel van die digter C. Louis Leipoldt (1880–1947). In 1999 het hy Leipoldt se graf in die Wes-Kaap besoek aangesien hy altyd van sy skryfwerk gehou het. En soms het hy boeke gekoop deur Antjie Krog, wat wêreldroem verwerf het met *Country of my Skull*, en ek het hom daaraan probeer herinner dat hy reeds twee eksemplare daarvan by die huis het, maar hy wou dit nogtans hê. Ek het my tyd gemors as ek met hom daaroor probeer stry. Hy het een keer selfs kwaad vir my geword toe ek sê hy het al reeds die boek, toe koop ons maar vir hom ’n vierde of ’n vyfde eksemplaar.

Hy sou ook soms aankondig dat hy ’n woordeboek nodig het. Nadat ons ’n paar woordeboeke by verskeie geleenthede gekoop het, het ek besef een van die domste dinge wat ek kon doen, was om vir hom te sê ons het net ’n paar weke vantevore ’n woordeboek gekoop. Die woordeboek was ook net ’n verskoning om by die boekwinkel uit te kom. Ek dink ek het seker twintig grootdruk- Oxford-woordeboeke

saam met hom gekoop. Selfs in oorsese lande sou hy aankondig dat hy ’n woordeboek moes kry en ons sou die boekwinkel naaste aan die hotel opsoek, die woordeboek koop en huis toe bring sonder dat hy ooit ’n bladsy daarin sou omblaai. Hy kon eenvoudig nie sê ‘ek wil tussen mense wees’ of ‘ek wil die stad sien’ nie. Ek dink hy het gevoel dit sou ydel voorkom as hy dit doen, en dus het hy ’n boekwinkel of ’n pen as verskoning gebruik. Dis een van die nadele van roem. Hy kon nooit die goed doen wat ons as vanselfsprekend aanvaar nie. Eers wanneer daardie vryheid van jou weggeneem word, weet jy wat dit beteken en kan jy dit opreg waardeer.

Vreemd genoeg was dit die Afrikaanse afdeling in boekwinkels wat hom gelok het. Hy verwys in *Conversations with Myself* na die werk van C.J. Langenhoven:

> Wel, in die eerste plek het hy baie eenvoudig geskryf. In die tweede plek het hy ’n goeie humorsin gehad en sy skryfwerk was deels daarop gemik om die Afrikaner te bevry van die wil om die Engelse na te boots. Sy gedagte was om nasietrots by Afrikaners te skep, en dus het ek baie daarvan gehou.

Ek het aan hierdie woorde vasgeklou wat probeer om nasietrots by jong Afrikaners te wek vir wie en wat hulle is. Dit was vir Madiba belangrik dat ’n mens ’n individu bly en jou geskiedenis en voorsate erken, en ek het dié woorde gereeld in gesprekke met jong Afrikaners opgesê.

Ons was ook een keer in ’n boekwinkel in ’n voorstad naby die Universiteit van Pretoria, in die middel van die studentegebied. Ons was op pad terug van sy kleinseun se gradeplegtigheid toe die konvooi tot stilstand kom. Ek het uit my motor gespring (soos gewoonlik het ek my eie motor bestuur) om die veiligheidsmense te vra hoekom ons stilhou. Die antwoord was eenvoudig: ons gaan ’n boekwinkel besoek. Ons het deur ’n paar boeke geblaai, toe gaan staan hy stil by ’n rak waarop materiaal oor ander tale uitgestal is. ’n Mens kon boeke en opnames koop wat jou sou help om ’n ander taal aan te leer. En so kom dit toe dat ons ’n stel gekoop het om Portugees te leer. Madiba het baie tyd in Mosambiek deurgebring en wou die taal leer sodat hy kon verstaan wanneer mense dit in Maputo praat. Hy het my laat belowe dat ek nie vir mevrou Machel sou vertel nie omdat hy haar taal wou leer en haar dan daarmee wou verras; ’n baie romantiese gebaar. Ek dink nie hy het die pakkie ooit oopgemaak nie. En ek weet nie wat het van die stel geword nie, maar ons het nooit verder gekom

as ‘goeiemôre’, ‘dankie’ en ‘asseblief’ in Portugees nie.

Op 14 November 2006 was Madiba op pad na die Saxon-hotel waar hy Morgan Freeman vir middagete sou ontmoet. Ons het in ’n konvooi gery en ek was soos gewoonlik agter die konvooi met my eie motor. Ons was laat. Ek het altyd ’n stryd gehad om mense van Madiba te weg hou en om seker te maak ons is nie laat vir enigiets nie, aangesien ek geweet het hoe belangrik stiptelikheid vir hom was. Hierdie was een van daardie geleenthede waar ons senuweeagtig probeer het om uit die verkeer weg te kom sodat hy betyds vir sy ete-afspraak kon opdaag. Dit was net blou ligte en sirenes oral soos ons deur die stilstaande verkeer probeer kom.

By ’n kruising waar ons regs moes draai, het ons die pad by ’n verkeerslig begin oorsteek. Die polisie het die ander verkeer tot stilstand gedwing en een van hul motors by die kruising geparkeer om die hoofmotor in die konvooi en dié wat volg toe te laat om gladweg deur die kruising te ry, al is die verkeersligte rooi of groen. Dis presies wat hulle dié keer gedoen het en ons het die kruising binnegegaan. ’n Man in ’n sportmotor het in die pad afgejaag gekom met oorfone in sy ore en het duidelik nie die sirenes gehoor of gesien wat voor hom gebeur nie. Hy het op volle vaart in ’n veiligheidsmotor vasgejaag wat die kruising versper het. Dit het gelyk asof alles in stadige aksie gebeur. Ek kon sien hoe die BMW X5 met die impak van die botsing in die lug opskiet. Die konvooi het ’n paar sekondes lank gestop en dit was die eerste keer dat ek die presidensiële beskermingseenheid in aksie gesien het. Hulle was buitengewoon goed.

Die veiligheidswagte in die motor wat deur die sportmotor getref is, het uitgespring, hul vuurwapens gegryp en in die ander motors ingeklim, myne inkluis, sodat ons Madiba so gou moontlik van die toneel kon wegkry. Ons het die beskadigde motor en twee van die lyfwagte op die toneel laat agterbly en reguit na die hotel toe gery. Madiba het in ’n ander rigting gekyk toe die ongeluk gebeur het en nie die impak gehoor nie omdat sy motor swaar gepantser was en tot ’n groot mate klankdig was. Die veiligheidsmense het hom by die hotel afgelaai en is toe terug na die toneel om hul kollegas te help. Ek het ’n vriendin gebel wie se kantoor oorkant die ongelukstoneel was. Sy het van haar personeel gestuur om ons manne te help. Madiba het middagete saam met Morgan geniet asof daar niks gebeur het nie.

Lori, Mogan se sakevennoot wat by hom was, het gesê dit was duidelik dat ons almal geskok was toe ons daar aankom, behalwe Madiba. Dit was redelik tipies van die lewe saam met Madiba. Baie min dinge het hom geraak, want waar hy ook al was, was daar beskermende lae wat die druk van die alledaagse lewe om hom kon absorbeer.

Dit was die jaar waarin die rolprent *The Last King of Scotland* uitgereik is en omdat my idees begin opraak het oor maniere waarop ek Madiba kon besig hou, het ek hom gevra of hy die fliek wou gaan kyk, aangesien dit oor ’n stuk geskiedenis handel wat hy so goed ken. Nu Metro het die hele rolprentteater vir Madiba bespreek en ’n private vertoning gereël op ’n tyd wat hom gepas het. Hulle het ons ook gehelp om die rolprentkompleks deur ’n ingang aan die agterkant binne te kom. Toe iemand springmielies aanbied, het hy gesê: ‘Nee, ek het genoeg daarvan gehad. Dis nou die jong mense se beurt.’ Hy het na my en die veiligheidsmense verwys. Ek twyfel of Madiba ooit aan springmielies voorgestel is, maar aangesien hy nooit in sy lewe gepeusel het nie, het hy nou geen begeerte gehad om daarmee te begin nie. Hy het die rolprent baie geniet en toe ek vir hom sê Forest Whitaker, wat die rol van Idi Amin in die fliek vertolk het, sou Suid-Afrika besoek, wou hy hom graag ontmoet. Hy was ook by twee ander geleenthede in die rolprentteater, een keer om *Fahrenheit 9/11* van Michael Moore te sien en ’n ander keer om *The Queen* te kyk. Hy het ’n paar keer tydens laasgenoemde fliek in my rigting gedraai wanneer hy Helen Mirren op die skerm sien en gefluister: ‘Dis mos die koningin daai, nè?’ Dit was kostelik om te sien hoe iemand soos Madiba ’n fliek geniet. Iets waaraan hy nie gewoond was nie en iets wat ons almal as vanselfsprekend aanvaar.

Ek onthou toe die Suid-Afrikaanse rolprentregisseur Gavin Hood ’n Oscar vir die rolprent *Tsotsi* gewen het met Terry Pheto en Presley Chweneyagae in die hoofrolle. Die drie het Madiba by sy huis in Kaapstad besoek nadat hulle van Los Angeles teruggekeer het en ons was baie trots op hulle. Dit was slegs die tweede keer dat ’n Suid-Afrikaner ’n Oscar gewen het (na Charlize Theron) en dit het die nuus dae lank oorheers. Madiba was so opgewonde om ’n Oscar te kon vashou dat hy in ’n grap gevra het of hy dit maar kan hou. Daar was algehele verwarring op Gavin se gesig. Natuurlik sal ’n mens selfs jou

Oscar vir Nelson Mandela wou gee. Of dalk nie.

Vroeg in 2007 het prins Albert van Monaco aangebied om later daardie selfde jaar 'n geldinsamelingsgeleentheid vir die Nelson Mandela-stigting saam met dié van sy eie stigting in Monaco aan te bied, mits Madiba dit sou bywoon. Madiba was moeg gereis en wou net by die huis bly en tyd saam met mevrou Machel deurbring. Maar wanneer koninklikes hom uitgenooi het, was hy meer bereid om in te stem. Soms sou hy voorstel dat ons êrens heen reis, maar dan sou hy daarvan vergeet en ons het geweet hy wou dit nie regtig graag doen nie, anders sou hy onthou het. Achmat Dangor, ons destydse uitvoerende hoof, het my gevra om saam met 'n kollega en die koninklike kantoor in Monaco aan die geleentheid te werk.

Ek sou elke maand Monaco toe reis. Ons het vergaderings by prins Albert se kantoor gehad, maar dit het spoedig duidelik geword dat hulle, soos enige administrasie, hul eie magstryd gevoer het. Dit was een van die moeilikste take wat aan my opgelê is.

Ek het elke mens met geld wat ek ken genader om tafels vir die geleentheid aan hulle te verkoop. Ek het e-posse uitgestuur aan mense wat ek oor die jare ontmoet het om hulle te vertel van die artikels wat opgeveil sou word en ek het gehoop hulle sou ons ondersteun, en hulle het. Uiteindelik het die meeste van Madiba se vriende van baie jare opgedaag. Dit het my nege maande se intense kommunikasie met mense wêreldwyd gekos om hulle te oorreed om die veiling te ondersteun en op hul eie koste Monaco toe te reis. Dit was 'n suksesvolle insamelingsprojek en al die moeite werd. Ek was trots op wat ons bereik het. Die stigting het 'n stewige bedraggie ingesamel waarop hy 'n uitkeerfonds kon bou en sy voortbestaan help verseker, maar dit was steeds nie genoeg om volkome gemoedsrus te hê nie.

Tydens een van my besoeke aan Monaco het ek siek geword en moes in 'n hospitaal opgeneem word vir x-strale. Ek het gedink ek het longontsteking. Benewens die feit dat niemand 'n woord Engels kon praat nie, wat 'n eenvoudige mediese ondersoek min of meer onmoontlik gemaak het, was die hospitaal nie van die allerbeste nie. Die oomblik toe ek regop kon staan, het ek 'n vliegtuig Londen toe gehaal waar twee van my voormalige kollegas, 'n dokter en 'n lyfwag, gewoon het en ek het op hulle hulp staatgemaak. Die ironie was dat

ek gedink het ek is besig om dood te gaan en die enigste mense wat my kon help, was my gewese kollegas. Ek het geen ander ondersteuningstelsel gehad nie. Dit was net die mense wat om my gewerk het en ek het besef hoe geïsoleerd ek van die buitewêreld geword het.

Op pad na Monaco moes Madiba en mevrou Machel Londen toe reis om ’n standbeeld van hom by Parliament Square te onthul. Terwyl ek besig was met die reëlings vir Monaco moes ek ook gereeld met Wendy Woods, die vrou van die afgestorwe Donald Woods, al twee anti-apartheidsaktiviste, kommunikeer om reëlings te tref vir die standbeeld se onthulling. Wendy was saam met Richard Attenborough aan die spits van die organiseringskomitee. Ek was mal oor hom en het dit baie geniet om hom te ontmoet. Dit was ’n historiese gebeurtenis en een van die min geleenthede waar Madiba oorreed kon word om ’n standbeeld van homself te onthul. Hy was altyd gekant teen dinge wat na hom genoem is of standbeelde wat opgerig is of om op enige ander manier vereer te word. Hy het ons aanhoudend herinner aan die feit dat daar ander helde van die struggle ook was wat erken en vereer moes word. En sou hy wel instem tot ’n standbeeld soos dié, sou hy verkies om dit nie self te onthul nie uit vrees dat hy verwaand sou voorkom.

Ons het ’n goeie verhouding met die Browns en hul personeel gehad en dit was altyd lekker om hulle te besoek. Hoewel Gordon Brown ’n paar dae later by die onthulling sou wees, was dit gepas vir ons om vooraf ’n hoflikheidsbesoek aan hom te bring. Op 28 Augustus 2008, voordat ons by 10 Downing Street ingestap het, het ek Madiba ingelig dat die pers ons sou inwag en dat ons ingestem het toe die premier se kantoor gevra het vir ’n fotosessie waar die premier saam met Madiba en mevrou Machel afgeneem kon word. Madiba was besig om baie vergeetagtig te raak en het dit selfs in die openbaar erken. Hy moes aanhoudend herinner word wat mense van hom verwag en elke oomblik gewaarsku word wat volgende sou gebeur. Maar dan was daar ook altyd die momente van volslae helderheid, wanneer hy ons sou verras met sy skerp humorsin en wanneer hy presies geweet het wat hy doen en waarmee hy besig was.

Ek het vir hom gesê daar sou nie van hom verwag word om enige vrae te beantwoord wanneer ons die pers by 10 Downing Street

ontmoet nie, maar dat hy eenvoudig kon sê hy is bly om daar te wees en om Gordon Brown te sien. Toe ons instap, het die twee oor neteligheidjies gepraat en Madiba het na die media gedraai en in 'n grap gesê: 'Ek en my vrou is trots en bly om hier te wees, want soos julle weet, was hierdie een van ons heersers, maar ons het hulle tot 'n val gebring. En nou is ons almal gelyk.' Almal het begin lag, behalwe ek. Ek was geskok en het nie geweet hoe die media op so 'n stelling sou reageer nie. Madiba het 'n goeie humorsin gehad en dit was sy manier om te benadruk dat ons weg van kolonialisme beweeg het.

Ons het ons bes probeer om nie toe te laat dat hy hom in situasies bevind waar hy oorweldig sou word nie en dit het die stres en spanning vererger. Ek het nie meer bekommerd gevoel wanneer ek sy toespraak by die podium moes aflewer nie; nou het al my sorge om hom gewentel. Sou hy die druk kon hanteer? Was alles reg? Maar elke keer wanneer hy op 'n verhoog verskyn en agter 'n podium gaan staan het, was die ou Madiba terug en so sterk soos altyd. Dit was moeilik vir ons jong mense om die verouderingsproses gade te slaan. Ons het ook nie altyd geweet hoe om dit te hanteer nie. Ons moes heeltyd aanpas, dink en beplan, gereed maak vir elke moontlike situasie net om te verseker dat alles goed sou verloop en dat ons vir elke gebeurlikheid gereed was. Oor die jare heen het die reëlings van die eenvoudigste ontmoetings verander van 'ja, natuurlik, dis bevestig' na 'kan ons nader aan die tyd bevestig?' na 'dis moeilik om nou te voorspel wanneer dit moontlik sal wees' na 'dis eenvoudig nie meer moontlik nie'. Die proses het sy eie metamorfose gehad waarvan die tydverloop deur Madiba se veroudering bepaal is.

Na die suksesvolle geldinsamelingsgeleentheid in Monaco is ons Parys toe. President Nicolas Sarkozy het Madiba by die lughawe kom ontmoet en hy was geraak deur hierdie gebaar en het jare daarna nog genoem hoe beleefd dit was van 'n dienende staatshoof om al die pad lughawe toe te kom om 'n voormalige president te ontmoet. Dit was ons eerste besoek aan die Ritz-hotel sedert prinses Diana se dood. Omdat ek is wie ek is, het ek die bestuurder van die hotel gevra om vir my die roete aan te dui waar sy gestap het en te vertel presies wat daardie aand gebeur het. Ek was nie besig om die saak te probeer ondersoek nie, maar ek het wel probeer verstaan hoe daardie nag moes gewees het.

Ek was bewus van die feit dat baie mense wat ek liefhet, besig was om ouer te word. Madiba het in 2007 nege-en-tagtig geword. Ek het seker gemaak dat ons nooit ander mense se verjaardae vergeet nie en wanneer iemand siek word, sou ons blomme stuur of soms net uitvra oor hul welstand sonder om enigiets terug te verwag. Dit was my eenvoudige manier om in verhoudings te belê en dit het vir my geen sin gemaak om mense te kontak net wanneer jy iets van hulle wou hê nie. En dit was ongeskik. Ek het onlangs gelees 'die lewe verg 'n klein bietjie tyd en baie verhouding' en dít is waaroor alles gaan.

Ek dink mense het gereeld gewonder waarmee ek besig was by die stigting en dit was moeilik om te bereken wat ek vermag het, behalwe spesifieke projekte om geld in te samel. Ek het verhoudings aan die lewe gehou. Ek het middagetes en die ontbyte bygewoon en meer koffie gedrink as wat goed is vir enige mens om ons waardering en belangstelling in mense te bevestig, of hulle nou vir ons geld gegee het of nie. Soms het dit gevoel asof die mense my oorweldig, aangesien ek van nature eintlik maar inkennig is. Maar ek het nietemin belangstelling in mense getoon en was altyd opreg en het die beste bedoelings gehad. Ek het altyd seker gemaak hulle kry almal Kerskaartjies of goeie wense vir Ramadan of Joodse feestye. Soos Madiba ouer geword het, kon hy dit nie meer persoonlik doen nie en die stigting kon dit ook nie meer bekostig om duisende kaartjies te laat druk nie. Ek het nietemin probeer om hierdie klein gebare voort te sit. Madiba het my immers geleer die belangrikste ding wat enige mens 'n ander kan gee, is sy of haar tyd. In 'n brief aan sy dogter Zindzi het hy op 1 Maart 1981 geskryf, terwyl hy nog in die tronk was, wat later in *Conversations with Myself* opgeneem sou word:

> Baie keer wanneer ek op en af stap in die klein sel, of terwyl ek in my bed lê, strek my gedagtes ver en wyd en ek onthou hierdie episode en daardie fout. Onder hierdie gedagtes tel dié een toe ek gewonder het of ek tydens my beste dae, buite die tronk, genoeg dankbaarheid getoon het vir die liefde en goedheid van ander wat my bevriend het en wat my selfs gehelp het toe ek arm was en gesukkel het.

Wat ek daarin lees, is dat dit vir hom uiters belangrik was om altyd hoflik en dankbaar te wees omdat ons nooit weet of ons die geleentheid gaan kry om mense te bedank of eer aan hulle te betoon wanneer hulle goed was vir ons nie.

Dit was daardie jaar ook my pa se sewentigste verjaardag en die volgende jaar my ma s'n. Ons het besluit om almal saam op 'n familievakansie te gaan en ek en my broer en sy lewensmaat het

besluit om my ouers se koste te dra. Hulle was nog nie sedert die laat 1970's in Mauritius nie en ons het feitlik nooit tyd gehad vir 'n familievakansie nie. Ons het na Sugar Beach, 'n oord in Mauritius, vertrek. Terwyl ons op vakansie was, het my broer se lewensmaat, Rick, 'n oproep van sy ouers ontvang. Hulle het ons honde opgepas. Ek dink daar was omtrent tien honde op hul kleinhoewe buite Pretoria. Ek onthou toe hy die oproep ontvang en opgestaan het. Hy het teruggekom en ek het kos by die buffet gaan haal. Toe ek terugkom, was dinge somber om die tafel en ek het oor my honde uitgevra en hulle het gesê alles is in die haak. Maar my broer is 'n vreemde mens, dit het gelyk of hy geïrriteerd was met my en ek kon aanvoel iets is verkeerd. Die aand toe ons terug was in Suid-Afrika het ek my na die kleinhoewe gehaas om die honde te gaan haal. Toe ek my motor parkeer het ek gesien my pa is klaar daar. Hy het na my toe aangeloop gekom, my hand gevat en gesê: 'Zelda, Roxy is dood.' My baba! My arme baba was dood! Sy was op hitte toe ons vertrek het en al die tefies is by mekaar gehou en 'n geveg het uitgebreek en hulle het op die swakste een toegesak.

Dit was een van die hartseerste dae van my lewe. Ek het elke minuut berou wat ek nie saam met Roxy deurgebring het nie en ek wou my werk die skuld gee vir die feit dat ons nie meer gereeld saam was nie. Hoe sou ek ooit kinders kon hê as ek nie eens genoeg tyd gehad het om saam met my honde deur te bring nie? Dit was my kind of die naaste aan 'n kind wat ek nog gekom het. Ek het gevoel ek het haar in die steek gelaat.

Ek moes 'n lang tyd sit en ek het besluit dat hierdie die keuses was wat ek in my lewe gemaak het. Ek kan niemand die skuld gee behalwe myself nie, maar kan ook nie die woord 'skuld' gebruik wanneer ek soveel voordele en geleenthede gekry het nie. Ek het getreur en vir drie dae na Roxy se dood nie werk toe gegaan nie. Dit was vyf dae voordat 46664 'n konsert in Johannesburg aangebied het. Ek kon myself nie regruk nie. Dit was die ergste ding wat tot in daardie stadium met my gebeur het. Dit het my minstens 'n jaar geneem om van haar dood te herstel en tot vandag het sy nog 'n plekkie in my hart.

Roxy het die vorige jaar kleintjies gehad en ek het hulle verkoop

(twee van hulle is kleintyd dood). Hulle het almal voor hulle weg is name gekry, politici se name, en een was Indira, vernoem na Indira Gandhi, die derde premier van Indië wat in 1984 om die lewe gebring is. Maar in April na Roxy se dood het die mense wat Indira gekoop het my gebel en gesê hulle sou haar moes laat uitsit, tensy ek 'n ander tuiste vir haar kon vind, want sy het nie goed aangepas nie en hulle was bekommerd oor hul kind se veiligheid by die hond. Ek het haar dieselfde dag nog by my huis laat aflaai en behalwe vir haar pa, Winston, is sy nou die liefde van my lewe. Om Bostonse terriërs te hê is terapeuties vir my. Hulle het my deur my moeilikste dae gehelp. Dis hulle wat ek mis wanneer ek op reis is en dis aan hulle wat ek dink terwyl ek in die dag werk. Ek hou daarvan om die grappie te maak dat ek ten minste nie skoolgeld vir my kinders hoef te betaal nie. So, ek kan my skoolgeld aan my motorfietsryery bestee!

10

The Biggest Fundraiser of My Life

Madiba was turning ninety and I was thirty-eight. I never had imagined that he would turn ninety or that I would still be with him at the age of thirty-eight. Yet it felt like time passed so quickly. I was starting to realize and comprehend the full value of my privileges and experiences. And, more than ever, I was willing to contribute whatever it took to ensure that his ninetieth was the biggest fundraiser in our organization's history in his honour.

Madiba was no longer keen to leave the country to go on holiday. Like every year in January, the house in Houghton had to be closed for a few weeks to enable the staff to go on leave. The staff would also serve Madiba in Qunu, which meant that going to Qunu was not an option. Mrs Machel asked me to look at a few other options and I contacted a good friend, Jabu Mabuza, who is the Chairman of Tsogo Sun in South Africa to ask for advice. We decided on Noetzie where a few old castles are built on the shore, not easily accessible for the public. The castles are surrounded by the Knysna forest and Madiba loved sitting outside looking at the forest. Long after that holiday he would ask me sometimes: 'By the way, Zeldina, you took us to the Knysna forest, right?' 'Yes Khulu,' I would say, although he didn't mean that I really took them but rather that I made the arrangements.

Early in the year we received a call from a former Minister of Foreign Affairs during the apartheid years, Mr Pik Botha, indicating that Professor Stephen Hawking was scheduled to visit South Africa and that he wanted to meet Madiba. Mr Botha had contact with Prof. Hawking through a university in South Africa he was involved with. In the year 2000 Mr Botha had left the old National Party and joined the ANC, much to the public's amusement. Madiba of course

welcomed such a move in favour of the ANC, whatever the motives may have been. At first we said no to the meeting and then we were talked into reversing that decision, as was the case on so many occasions.

We agreed with Mr Botha about a protocol for the meeting. Madiba was no longer able to deal with any surprises in meetings. He was becoming old fast and he needed clear direction and guidance. Mr Botha was accompanied by Professor Block, a gentleman from the University of Johannesburg who was famous for physics and his distribution of pieces of 'moon rock', a piece of which he'd given to Madiba years before.

It was amazing to experience Prof. Hawking but it took some concentration to get a ninety-year-old who knew very little about technology to communicate with the Professor, as he was talking through a computer. Mr Botha, not knowing the circumstances of Madiba's difficulty in communicating, kept interfering, and at some point I felt my face going red as I told him: 'Mr Botha, please stop. We cannot all try to tell Madiba how to do this. Let him figure this out himself as I have explained to him.' It was often the problem with people. They either thought Madiba was completely unintelligent or different people in the room thought they had to tell him how to do something, because of his age, which didn't help the situation at all. Madiba's hearing aids would soon cut out all the voices in the room trying to tell him what to do and he would appear confused.

When you tried to tell people not to interfere they took it personally or thought you were being territorial, yet they themselves had no experience dealing with a ninety-year-old trying to conduct a professional life. The meeting with Prof. Hawking was therefore not a great conversation, and to crown it all, despite agreeing that they would not throw any surprises at Madiba during the meeting, books and messages appeared that Prof. Block and Mr Botha wanted Madiba to sign, personalize and inscribe. I was furious. It was clear that they had no respect for the protocol they had signed and agreed to prior to the meeting.

Surprises threw Madiba, and he would then look at one with helplessness in his eyes and one would be left to explain or argue with visitors. By now Madiba knew me well enough and I didn't pretend to be anyone I am not. We instituted some protocols. We also had had enough of people approaching us with a particular request and then, once they sat in front of him, presenting a totally different agenda.

People knew he found it hard to say ‘no’ to them. Soon, when the protocols became known to people, some tried to argue that it was like the behaviour of the Gestapo. What do you do? We insisted as we were left with no options. People kept on pushing their luck.

It was also in June 2008 that we learned of the sudden illness of John Reinders, the Chief of Protocol during Madiba’s Presidency. Madiba liked John a lot and was grateful for his service. John was already in a coma in a hospital in Bloemfontein by the time we visited him. An outcry followed in our inner circle about Madiba travelling to Bloemfontein to see a white man in hospital. It is not something anyone would ever dare to confront Madiba with personally but I wasn’t spared the backlash. I never managed to send people to him to lay such complaints but simply absorbed them and walked away. By now I had the skin of a baby rhino and even though it hurt to think that Madiba was to be deprived of visiting people he liked, it was now becoming like water off a duck’s back to me.

I made a point of responding to newspaper articles that dealt with race issues to remind people of what Madiba so often repeated, that if we continued to judge people by the colour of their skin, chances are that we have a long way to go building the rainbow nation we all dreamt of. And he was right. I was getting sick of being labelled according to the colour of my skin too. I’m a South African and that is all that mattered.

* * *

46664, headed by Tim Massey, was organizing a massive ninetieth-birthday concert in London’s Hyde Park in July. Again we relied on friends and relationships and started preparing them to budget for a ninetieth celebration fundraiser. Tim and I proposed a fundraising dinner to be held together with the concert.

Although it was often tiresome and tedious to arrange an event for Madiba in a foreign country I made sure that a South African element was always present, even when it came to the detail of the food served. The guest list was another problem. Everyone and his mother wanted to be there but we only had limited space.

Tables were sold in tiers and we filled up a massive marquee that was erected in Hyde Park. People always wanted to be invited to these dinners but they didn’t always want to pay. You just get to live with it. Some people will never see the common sense that the more free

seats you give away, the less your chances of fundraising, and having a hundred free guests as opposed to twenty free guests increases your overheads and the fundraising becomes less successful. Some people, having done little to nothing to fundraise or support any of Madiba's work, always wanted to be on the free-seat list. And at some point you just have to put your foot down because your professional reputation is on the line and the success or failure of the fundraiser will come back to haunt you.

Together with a friend who I knew from her time in the White House, Sara Latham, and the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund in the UK we put together a guest list to ensure that it would be a profitable event. The event was sold out and we included some of Madiba's friends, family and fellow struggle veterans to ensure representation. In the days leading to his arrival London was buzzing and I couldn't believe that Madiba's birthday was around the corner and in London there was so much excitement, even among ordinary people.

* * *

It was while preparing the logistics for the trip that we got caught in the middle of another power battle. President Mbeki was still President in South Africa and politically it was an uncertain time for many. In 2005 President Mbeki and the ANC 'released' Deputy President Jacob Zuma from all his duties, following a ruling by the Durban High Court which found a corrupt relationship between Schabir Shaik and Jacob Zuma. In 2006 a family friend of Zuma's laid a rape charge against him, while Zuma argued that they had consensual sex. Zuma was cleared of the charge at the end of the trial and it was widely speculated that the Mbeki administration was waging a political war to prevent Zuma from ousting Mbeki at the four-yearly ANC national conference in 2007. Indeed, in December 2007 President Mbeki was unseated by Jacob Zuma, who was elected ANC President.

The leadership struggle manifested itself on all levels of society. You were either a Mbeki or a Zuma person. As much as the nation was united following Madiba's Presidency there were clear divisions deeply rooted in every level of society. Once Zuma was the President of the ANC the ANC also 'recalled' President Mbeki as President of South Africa in a very humiliating way, arguing that he no longer served the interests of the party and its people. The Deputy President

at the time, Kgalema Motlanthe, was appointed Acting President until the next national elections, when Jacob Zuma was elected the country's President.

The Nelson Mandela Foundation was non-political. And Madiba himself had detached himself from politics. With his retirement he stopped going to ANC meetings and announced that although he was never going to part with the ANC and that he would always remain a loyal member, the running of the party was up to the younger generation. However, people willingly perceived us to be anti-Mbeki and therefore Zuma loyalists. It was in the middle of this power struggle, preparing for Madiba's visit to London, that we informed the South African High Commission in London about our intention to visit.

Three days before our arrival for Madiba's ninetieth-birthday celebrations in London I received a call from the South African High Commission logistics office, indicating that they would not extend the usual courtesy of allowing Madiba to move through the VIP room at Heathrow domestic arrivals and they would not pay the few hundred pounds it cost. I exploded: 'What? Are you serious? For the past nine years you allowed him, organized, paid for the use of the VIP room because he is a former head of state of South Africa and now you expect him to what? Walk through the terminal building like a normal passenger?' I even wrote an email sarcastically pointing out that had it not been for Nelson Mandela many of us wouldn't have jobs. I was bordering on being ridiculous but I was beyond anger.

I declared my 'fight' to our CEO and Chairman as I was willing to do whatever it took to stand by my principles. I have never burdened Madiba with my problems or challenges, and in this particular case I also thought that it would hurt and upset him to learn about this matter. It cost a few hundred pounds to pay for the VIP lounge. I was in principle not going to allow the Foundation to pay for it. This sudden change of decision that a former head of state of South Africa was no longer allowed the courtesy of the support of the foreign mission to move through a VIP room had to be changed at Cabinet level as far as I was concerned. It was not a decision to be taken by an office bearer. They simply didn't give in and told me because it was not an official visit tasked by the South African government they couldn't pay. Yet they had paid on many other occasions when there was nothing official to the visit.

People assumed that Madiba was aligned with Jacob Zuma in the

ANC's power struggle and therefore did things that would be seen to carry the approval of President Mbeki. Mr Mbeki would never have been so petty himself to decide to withdraw a privilege like this to a former President, and it was evident that this incident was a manifestation of that divide among South Africans, of either being a Mbeki person or a Zuma person. (I eventually called Prime Minister Gordon Brown's office and asked them to arrange for the use of the lounge from their side, which they did.)

* * *

The event was a massive success. We raised over R105 million (around £7.5 million at the current exchange rate) clean profit and to date it was the most successful fundraiser of any of the Mandela charities. The money was split between the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, the Mandela Rhodes Foundation and the Nelson Mandela Foundation to further their respective mandates. My favourite auction item was a cast replica of Madiba's hand bought by Sol Kerzner for £2.9 million, making Sol the biggest donor of any of the Mandela charities at that point.

Madiba was almost intrigued by other people's wealth and fame. Yet that was never the consideration with which he dealt with people. He just found it fascinating that someone could be as rich as a Bill Gates or Sol Kerzner. He would often boast about the wealth of his friends in South Africa – Patrice Motsepe, Tokyo Sexwale, Douw Steyn, the Ruperts and the Oppenheimers to name but a few. They were all good to him and whenever he called on them to support his charities, build a school or clinic or support a cause he was arguing for they willingly did so. Yet it was critical to him that even when he didn't call upon them, they were always treated with the utmost respect and courtesy. He wrote in a letter to Zenani Mandela, quoted in the book Conversations With Myself, 'But the habit of attending to small things and of appreciating small courtesies is one of the important marks of a good person.' And so we never forgot a birthday or an anniversary and we made sure he spent time with people even when there was nothing to be asked of them, as these were part of the 'small things'. To honour Madiba, you have to honour his relationships with people.

* * *

Madiba insisted on staying longer than expected at the fundraising event and when he eventually went to bed I escorted him back to the hotel to enable Mrs Machel to remain at the event a little longer, so it didn't appear that they both deserted the main table at once. Afterwards I returned to the event, which certainly was one of the highlights of my career. I didn't want accolades or awards but I so desperately wanted Madiba to feel honoured and celebrated in a proper way while he could still enjoy it, and that night I felt we had achieved that. Driving back to the event from the hotel my heart was filled with pride and joy that he was able to witness just how much people revered him. Famous people and celebrity friends of Madiba all helped us to attract big donors and they were the people who travelled at their own cost, gave their time at no expense to honour Madiba and help us draw attention to his causes. Yes, they also benefited from the association, but one hand washes the other.

The concert the next evening was an equal success although the travelling was taking its toll on Madiba. He was tired. The usual scramble ensued for people to go up to Madiba and greet him. I watched from a distance as I could see there was going to be a fight about who got to greet him and who not. I felt incredibly sorry for him as I felt he really wanted to just enjoy the music and performances by South African, African and international artists, all performing for his birthday. I remember us watching a performance of a South African band named Mafikizolo in Tromsø, Norway, and how he enjoyed seeing them playing for him on an international stage. After all, this time it was his birthday.

Before Madiba went on stage I was approached by a tiny woman whom I didn't immediately recognize as Emma Bunton, the former Spice Girl singer. Emma was one of the celebrities making announcements or statements during the concert. Emma told one of the stage directors that she insisted on giving Madiba her present personally, either before or when he walked on stage. It was a huge box. I couldn't imagine that she would herself accept a huge box with a present inside from someone and carry it around all night. In addition I was also still p-ed off with the Spice Girls after I had learned that they had boasted about stealing toilet paper from Madiba's official residence while they visited him when he was President. So I had a preconceived opinion about her already. I didn't allow her to hand him the gift as he needed his hands to be free at all times.

As she walked on stage I could clearly see that she was upset and I told our security to keep a close eye on her as she was forcing her way to Madiba while many other, African artists were being pushed to the back. She may be a perfectly innocent lady, but in those circumstances you straighten your spine and tell off even celebrities if necessary. Part of my duty was to be proactive and to try and ensure that situations got resolved before they actually happened. I knew that Madiba would want the African artists present to take a prominent role around him while on stage and I wanted to make sure that he didn't get upset if the contrary happened. As Madiba walked onto the stage the crowd erupted. Some people cried and the noise was deafening. I was overwhelmed with excitement and joy for him.

* * *

Pressure was mounting on Madiba from the media and the public to speak out on the gross neglect of human rights in Zimbabwe under President Mugabe. We had been withstanding pressure from around the world for Madiba to make some kind of pronouncement because of the previous incidents where he was criticized for working independently from government because they felt his actions could interfere with diplomatic process. However, at the end his simple line was: 'Nearer to home we have seen the outbreak of violence against fellow Africans in our own country and the tragic failure of leadership in our neighbouring Zimbabwe.' And saying less meant more and not saying certain things meant saying others. The press around the world grabbed this and it headlined the news for a couple of days.

The following day Madiba also met with some old colleagues of his, all people who were in the Rivonia Trial with him back in the 1960s. It was more than forty years since the trial that sent Madiba to life imprisonment and he had not seen some of them since that time. He could vividly remember all of them and enjoyed spending time with them. Here they were having tea in the Dorchester Hotel in London while they last saw each other as prisoners in cells awaiting trial over forty years ago. Back at home the Foundation also arranged a private celebration for him with his former political colleagues from the Rivonia Trial and fellow ex-prisoners who were still alive and lived in South Africa. It was moving to watch these people interacting and I wished that I could have talked with some of them for hours, asking so many questions. The conversations were dominated by

'Have you seen so-and-so again?' 'Whatever happened to so-and-so?'

His ninetieth-birthday celebrations in London were the perfect ending to his international appearances. Twenty years earlier his seventieth birthday was celebrated at Wembley Stadium in England, viewed by more than 600 million people worldwide. The concert was named 'Free Mandela' and two years later he was a free man. Even though these celebrations were smaller it was a befitting way to end our travels, him being present where they celebrated his life. After that, we never went abroad again. He was becoming too old to travel.

* * *

Madiba sometimes called me from home to say that he was about to take the elevator down to the ground floor in his house. He was scared of being stuck in the elevator and I needed to call him in ten minutes to make sure that he was not stuck. At the time I thought it was funny but I now become sad when I think of it. Being there and answering those calls made me love the man even more, perhaps the fact that he depended upon me, yet it is exactly that admiration and love that caused so much animosity.

These calls also reminded me how much he had aged. Just a few years before, if he was stuck in an elevator he would be the person making everyone feel safe. Years earlier it had happened in Kampala with the Deputy President of Uganda. Of course, in addition to the people that needed to accompany him, everyone would try and fit into an elevator with Madiba. It made me very claustrophobic so I took the stairs. And as the devil may have it, he was stuck that day. For twenty minutes we stood outside on the ground floor waiting for technicians to come to their rescue. Emerging from the elevator eventually the Deputy President was in a panic and somewhat embarrassed, but Madiba had kept everyone entertained with his humour.

Mrs Machel taught me that I was to be true to myself and to always remember that the only thing that matters is my relationship with Madiba, that I cannot be held accountable for other people's relationships with him, and when I do something I must listen to my inner voice because it will always tell me what is right and wrong. If I was concerned about something or something troubled me, there was probably a reason for my feelings and I should go with what made me feel safest. Mrs Machel and I have not had an easy relationship over the years. I have been very sensitive to the fact that a young woman

spent all this time with her husband, a white woman told them when to get up and when to relax, and it couldn't have been easy to have people around you all the time. But despite that she is the one person who shows appreciation and respect and affords me dignity. I salute her ten thousand times for keeping her cool and teaching me the things she did.

* * *

Around his ninetieth birthday we also made sure Madiba enjoyed meals with many of his old colleagues and comrades, staff and friends in smaller groups. He also received a set of stamps from the national post office printed as a limited series commemorating his birthday. The stamps featured two of my favourite pictures of Madiba.

He had lunch with his former ANC ladies, Barbara Masekela, Jessie Duarte and Frene Ginwala, then with the artists from his generation – Dorothy Masuka, Miriam Makeba, Abigail Kubeka and Thandi Klaasen – and he attended an ANC rally in his honour on 2 August, during which attendees all enjoyed celebrating with him. The government also wanted to host a concert for the people but due to only last minute advertising the concert wasn't well attended. The June 16 Foundation was also allowed to hand over a statue to Madiba (16 June being Youth Day in South Africa, commemorating the start of the Soweto uprising in 1976). It was a beautiful statue of Hector Pieterson and I felt touched when Madiba received it. One of the board members made some remarks towards me about how grateful they were that I had taken care of Madiba, and I deeply appreciated this coming from an organization like theirs, established to remind the public about events that led to that fateful day in 1976. We had come a long way in this country. I was an Afrikaner and here they were thanking me.

It was around the same time when Madiba had the dream one night that I had resigned to take another job, and very seriously told me the next morning in the office that he dreamt that I'd deserted him. Me? Zelda la Grange? I reassured him that I would never, ever do that. I overcame my insecurities and was determined to serve him until the day one of us passed away.

10

Die grootste geldinsameling van my lewe

Madiba het negentig geword en ek was agt-en-dertig. Ek het nooit kon droom dat hy negentig sou word en dat ek steeds by hom sou wees op agt-en-dertig nie. Tog het dit gevoel of die tyd so vinnig verbygevlieg het. Ek het begin agterkom en verstaan wat die volle waarde van my voordele en ervarings was. En meer as ooit was ek bereid om by te dra, wat dit ook al sou verg, om seker te maak die geldinsameling ter ere van hom op sy negentigste verjaardag sou die grootste in ons organisasie se geskiedenis wees.

Madiba was nie meer lus om die land te verlaat om met vakansie te gaan nie. Soos elke jaar in Januarie moes die huis in Houghton ’n paar weke lank toegemaak word om die personeel ’n kans te gee om met verlof te gaan. Die personeel sou Madiba ook in Qunu moes bystaan, wat beteken het Qunu was nie ’n opsie vir vakansie nie. Mevrou Machel het my gevra om ’n paar ander moontlikhede te ondersoek en ek het ’n goeie vriend, Jabu Mabuza, voorsitter van die Tsogo Sun in Suid-Afrika, gebel om raad te vra. Ons het op Noetzie besluit, waar ’n paar ou kastele langs die see gebou is en nie maklik deur die publiek bereik kan word nie. Die kastele word deur die Knysna-woud omring en Madiba het graag buite gesit en na die woud gekyk. Lank na die vakansie sou hy my nog soms vra: ‘Terloops, Zeldina, jy het ons mos Knysna toe geneem, na die woud toe?’

‘Ja, Khulu’, sou ek sê, hoewel hy nie regtig gedink het ek het hulle geneem nie, maar net dat ek die reëlings getref het.

Vroeër daardie jaar het ons ’n oproep van meneer Pik Botha, voormalige minister van buitelandse sake tydens die apartheidsjare, ontvang. Hy het gesê professor Stephen Hawking was op pad Suid-Afrika toe en wou Madiba ontmoet. Meneer Botha het deur die Universiteit van Suid-Afrika kontak met professor Hawking gehad. In die jaar 2000 het meneer Botha die ou Nasionale Party verlaat en by die ANC aangesluit, tot groot vermaak van die publiek. Madiba het natuurlik so ’n swaai ten gunste van die ANC verwelkom, wat die motiewe daaragter ook al mag gewees het. Eers het ons die ontmoeting met professor Hawking van die hand gewys, maar toe is

ons omgepraat om dit wel te aanvaar, soos gereeld gebeur het.

Ek het met meneer Botha oor die protokol vir die ontmoeting ooreengekom. Madiba kon nie meer verrassings tydens ontmoetings hanteer nie. Hy het baie vinnig verouder en moes duidelike leiding ontvang. Meneer Botha is vergesel deur professor David Block van die Universiteit van Johannesburg, 'n fisikus wat beroemd was vir die 'maanrots' wat hy versprei het en waarvan hy 'n paar jaar tevore 'n deel aan Madiba gegee het.

Ons ontmoeting met professor Hawking was 'n ongelooflike ervaring, maar ek moes hard konsentreer om iemand van negentig, wat baie min van tegnologie weet, te help om met die professor te kommunikeer. Professor Hawking het deur 'n rekenaar gepraat. Meneer Botha het nie besef hoe moeilik dit was vir Madiba om te kommunikeer nie en hy het heeltyd ingemeng. Een keer het ek die bloed in my gesig voel opwel toe ek vir hom sê: 'Meneer Botha, hou asseblief op, ons kan nie almal vir Madiba sê hoe hy dit moet doen nie. Gee hom 'n kans om dit self uit te werk soos ek dit vir hom verduidelik het.' Dit was gereeld die probleem met mense. Party het gedink Madiba is geheel en al onintelligent, of anders sou verskillende mense in die kamer dink hulle moet vir hom sê hoe om 'n ding te doen as gevolg van sy ouderdom, wat glad nie die situasie vergemaklik het nie. Madiba se gehoorapparate sou vinnig al die stemme in die vertrek uitsny wat vir hom probeer sê wat hy moet doen, en hy sou verward lyk.

Wanneer jy vir mense sê hulle moenie inmeng nie, neem hulle dit gewoonlik persoonlik op of hulle dink jy steek 'n kleim af, maar hulle het self geen ervaring van hoe 'n mens met 'n negentigjarige oumens maak wat 'n professionele lewe probeer lei nie. Die byeenkoms met professor Hawking was dus nie 'n groot gesprek nie, en om alles te kroon het professor Block en meneer Botha nie by hul belofte gehou dat daar geen verrassings op Madiba sou wag nie. Daar was boeke en boodskappe wat hulle wou gehad het hy moet onderteken en boodskappe in skryf. Ek was woedend. Dit was duidelik dat hulle geen respek vir die protokol gehad het waarop ons ooreengekom het en wat hulle onderteken het nie.

Verrassings het Madiba verwar en hy sou dan hulpeloos na my kyk

en dan sou ek dit aan besoekers moes verduidelik of in 'n stryery met hulle betrokke raak. Teen dié tyd het Madiba my goed genoeg geken en ek het nie voorgegee om iemand te wees wat ek nie is nie. Ons het protokols ingestel. Ons het ook al genoeg gehad van mense wat ons met 'n spesifieke versoek sou nader en dan, wanneer hulle voor hom sit, 'n heel ander agenda te voorskyn bring. Mense het geweet hy sou dit moeilik vind om vir hulle nee te sê. Sodra mense van die protokol bewus geword het, sou sommige van hulle probeer sê dit was soos die gedrag van die Gestapo. Wat moet 'n mens doen? Ons het daarop aangedring aangesien ons geen ander keuse gehad het nie. Maar mense het aanhou probeer om dit te omseil.

Dit was ook in Junie 2008 dat ons verneem het van die skielike siekte van John Reinders, wat die hoof van protokol was tydens Madiba se presidentskap. Madiba het baie van John gehou en was dankbaar vir sy diens. Teen die tyd dat ons John in die hospitaal in Bloemfontein besoek het, was hy reeds in 'n koma. In ons binnekringe was daar verontwaardiging omdat Madiba so ver sou reis om 'n wit man in die hospitaal te besoek. Dis nie asof enigiemand Madiba hieroor sou konfronteer nie, maar ek moes onder die kritiek deurloop. Ek het nooit enigiemand na hom toe gestuur en gesê hulle moet eerder by hom kla as hulle wou kla nie; ek het dit doodgewoon gehanteer. Teen dié tyd het ek die vel van 'n klein renostertjie gehad. En hoewel dit seergemaak het om te dink dat Madiba besoeke ontsê is van mense van wie hy gehou het, was dit nou vir my soos water op 'n eend se rug.

Wanneer daar koerantartikels sou verskyn oor rassekwessies, het ek 'n punt daarvan gemaak om mense te herinner aan wat Madiba graag herhaal het, naamlik dat as ons sou aanhou om mense volgens hul velkleur te beoordeel, sou ons nooit die reënboognasie kon bou waarvan almal gedroom het nie. En hy was reg. Ek het siek en sat geraak vir die feit dat almal my volgens my velkleur beoordeel het. Ek is 'n Suid-Afrikaner en dit is al wat saakgemaak het.

46664, met Tim Massey aan die stuur, het 'n enorme popkonsert ter ere van Madiba se negentigste verjaardag in Hyde Park in Londen gereël. Ons het weer op vriende en verhoudings gesteun en 'n begroting opgestel vir 'n geldinsameling vir sy negentigste verjaardagviering. Ek en Tim het 'n geldinsamelingsete voorgestel om

met die konsert saam te val.

Hoewel dit baie keer vermoeiend en eentonig was om vir Madiba 'n geleentheid in die buiteland te reël, het ek seker gemaak daar is altyd 'n Suid-Afrikaanse element, selfs wat die kos wat voorgesit sou word betref. Die gastelys was 'n ander probleem; almal en sy ma wou daar wees, maar ons het beperkte ruimte gehad.

Tafels is in rye verkoop en ons het 'n enorme markiestent wat in Hyde Park opgerig is volgepak. Mense wou altyd na hierdie etes uitgenooi word, maar hulle wou nie altyd betaal nie. 'n Mens moet dit maar net aanvaar. Party mense sou eenvoudig nie die gesonde verstand hê om te besef hoe meer sitplekke jy gratis weggee, hoe minder kans het jy om geld in te samel nie. As mens honderd sitplekke gratis weggee pleks van twintig, is jou oorhoofse koste ook hoër en natuurlik samel jy minder geld in. Party van dié mense, wat nog niks gedoen het om met Madiba se geldinsamelings te help of hom in enige van sy werk ondersteun het nie, wou altyd op die lys vir gratis sitplekke wees. Daar kom 'n punt waar jy net jou voet dwars moet sit omdat jou professionele reputasie op die spel is en die welslae of mislukking van die geldinsameling jou altyd sal bybly.

Met die hulp van 'n vriendin, Sara Latham, wat ek geken het van haar tyd in die Withuis, en die Nelson Mandela-kinderfonds in die Verenigde Koninkryk, het ons 'n gastelys saamgestel om seker te maak dat dit 'n geleentheid sou wees wat geld verdien. Die geleentheid is uitverkoop en ons het 'n paar van Madiba se vriende, familielede en medevryheidsvegters ingesluit. In die paar dae voor sy aankoms het Londen gegons en ek kon nie glo Madiba se verjaardag was om die draai en dat daar soveel opwinding in die stad was nie, selfs onder gewone mense.

Terwyl ek besig was om die logistiek vir die reis voor te berei, is ons by nog 'n magstryd betrek. Thabo Mbeki was steeds president in Suid-Afrika en polities was dit vir almal 'n onsekere tyd. In 2005 het president Mbeki en die ANC sy adjunkpresident, Jacob Zuma, van al sy pligte onthef nadat die Durbanse hooggeregshof bevind het daar was 'n korrupte verhouding tussen Zuma en Schabir Shaik, sy finansiële adviseur. In 2006 het 'n familievriend van Zuma 'n verkragtingsaak teen hom aanhangig gemaak, terwyl Zuma beweer het sy het tot seks ingestem. Aan die einde van die verhoor is Zuma

vrygespreek en mense het bespiegel dat Mbeki se administrasie ’n politieke oorlog ontketen het om te verhinder dat Zuma Mbeki in 2007 by die vierjaarlikse nasionale konferensie van die ANC uit die kussings lig. In Desember 2007 het Zuma inderdaad vir president Mbeki geklop en is hy tot president van die ANC verkies.

Die leierskapstryd het op alle vlakke van die gemeenskap inslag gevind. Jy was óf in Mbeki se kamp óf in Zuma s’n. Waar die land onder Madiba se presidentskap verenig was, was daar nou duidelike skeidings met diep wortels in elke vlak van die samelewing. Toe Zuma eers president van die ANC was, het die ANC ook vir president Mbeki op ’n vernederende manier as president van Suid-Afrika ‘herroep’ en gesê dat hy nie meer die belange van die party en sy mense dien nie. Die destydse adjunkpresident, Kgalema Motlanthe, is intussen as president aangewys tot die volgende nasionale verkiesing toe Jacob Zuma tot die land se president verkies is.

Die Nelson Mandela-stigting was nie-polities. En Madiba self het hom van politiek losgemaak. Met sy aftrede het hy opgehou om ANC-vergaderings by te woon en aangekondig dat hy nooit sy bande met die ANC sou verbreek nie en altyd ’n lojale lid sou bly, al het hy die werksaamhede van die party aan die jonger generasie oorgelaat. Te midde van hierdie magstryd, terwyl ons besig was om vir Madiba se besoek aan Brittanje voor te berei, het ons die Suid-Afrikaanse hoëkommissariaat in Londen in kennis gestel van ons voorgenome besoek.

Drie dae voor ons aankoms in Londen het ek ’n oproep van die Suid-Afrikaanse hoëkommissariaat se logistiekkantoor ontvang met die boodskap dat hulle nie soos gewoonlik as welwillendheidsgebaar sal toelaat dat Madiba op hul onkoste (’n paar honderd pond) deur die BBP-saal by die Heathrow-lughawe se buitelandse aankomsaal stap nie. Ek het ontplof. ‘Wat! Is julle ernstig? Die afgelope nege jaar het julle dit toegelaat, gereël en vir die gebruik van die BBP-kamer betaal omdat hy ’n voormalige staatshoof van Suid-Afrika is, en nou verwag julle wát van hom? Moet hy nou soos ’n gewone passasier deur die aankomsaal loop?’ Ek het selfs ’n sarkastiese e-pos geskryf om vir hulle te sê as dit nie vir Nelson Mandela was nie, het baie van ons nie werk gehad nie. Ek was op die punt om myself belaglik te maak, maar ek was woedend verby.

Ek het ons uitvoerende hoof en voorsitter van my 'geveg' vertel omdat ek gewillig was om te doen wat ek ook al moes om by my beginsels te staan. Ek het Madiba nooit met my probleme opgesaal nie en ook nie met my uitdagings nie. In hierdie spesifieke geval het ek ook gedink dit sou hom ontstel en seermaak om hiervan te weet. Dit het 'n paar honderd pond gekos om vir die BBP-sitkamer te betaal. Uit beginsel sou ek nie toelaat dat die stigting daarvoor betaal nie. Hierdie skielike ommeswaai, dat 'n voormalige staatshoof van Suid-Afrika nie meer die welwillendheid en die steun van die hoëkommissariaat sou hê om deur die BBP-saal te beweeg nie, moes sover dit my betref op kabinetsvlak verander word. Dit is nie 'n besluit wat 'n amptenaar kan neem nie. Hulle wou eenvoudig nie toegee nie en het vir my gesê omdat dit nie 'n amptelike besoek van die Suid-Afrikaanse regering was nie, kon hulle nie betaal nie. Maar tog het hulle by baie vorige geleenthede daarvoor betaal toe daar niks amptelik omtrent die besoeke was nie.

Mense het aangeneem Madiba steun Jacob Zuma in die ANC se magstryd en om daardie rede het hulle opgetree op 'n manier wat hulle gedink het president Mbeki se goedkeuring sou wegdra. President Mbeki sou nooit self so kleinlik wees om 'n voorreg soos dié van 'n voormalige president weg te neem nie, en dit was duidelik dat hierdie voorval verteenwoordigend was van 'n skeiding tussen Suid-Afrikaners; dat jy óf 'n Mbeki-ondersteuner óf 'n Zuma-ondersteuner moet wees. (Ek het uiteindelik premier Gordon Brown se kantoor gebel en hulle gevra om die gebruik van die BBP-vertrek van hulle kant af te reël, wat hulle gedoen het.)

Die geldinsameling was 'n enorme sukses. Ons het 'n wins van meer as R105 miljoen getoon en tot op datum was dit die grootste geldinsameling van enige van die Mandela-liefdadighede. Die geld is verdeel tussen die Nelson Mandela-kinderfonds, die Mandela Rhodes-stigting, die FDC in Mosambiek en die Nelson Mandela-stigting om hul eie mandate te kon voortsit. My gunsteling-artikel by die veiling was 'n gegote afdruk van Madiba se hand wat Sol Kerzner vir £2,9 miljoen gekoop het. Dit het Sol die grootste enkele donateur vir enige van die Mandela-liefdadighede gemaak.

Madiba was baie geprikkel deur ander mense se rykdom en roem. En tog was dit nooit vir hom 'n oorweging in sy omgang met mense

nie. Hy het dit net fassinerend gevind dat iemand so ryk kon wees soos Bill Gates of Sol Kerzner. Hy sou ook gereeld spog met die rykdom van sy vriende in Suid-Afrika soos Patrice Motsepe, Tokyo Sexwale, Douw Steyn, die Ruperts en die Oppenheimers, om net 'n paar te noem. Hulle was almal goed vir hom en wanneer hy ook al hul steun gevra het om 'n skool of 'n kliniek te bou, of vir iets anders, was hulle altyd gewillig om te help. Maar vir hom was dit baie belangrik om hulle altyd met die grootste respek en hoflikheid te behandel, of hy nou iets van hulle nodig gehad het of nie. In 'n brief aan Zenani Mandela wat in *Conversations with Myself* aangehaal word, skryf hy: 'Die gewoonte om na klein dingetjies om te sien en om klein hoflikhede te waardeer, is een van die belangrike kenmerke van 'n goeie mens.' En dus het ons nooit 'n verjaardag of 'n herdenking vergeet nie en ons het seker gemaak dat hy tyd saam met mense deurbring selfs wanneer daar niks is wat hy van hulle wou vra nie, aangesien dit deel was van die 'klein dingetjies'. Om Madiba te eer, moet jy sy menseverhoudings eer.

Madiba het aangedring om langer as wat ons verwag het by die geldinsamelingsgeleentheid te bly, en toe hy uiteindelik bed toe gaan, het ek hom na die hotel vergesel sodat mevrou Machel kon agterbly, want ons wou nie die indruk skep dat al twee die hooftafel tegelykertyd verlaat nie. Ek is later terug na die geleentheid, wat seker een van die hoogtepunte van my loopbaan was. Ek wou nie lofvereringe of toekennings kry nie, maar ek wou bitter graag hê Madiba moes voel dat hy op die regte manier vereer en gevier word terwyl hy dit nog kon waardeer. Daardie aand het ek gevoel ons het dit bereik. Op pad terug na die geleentheid van die hotel af het my hart van trots en geluk oorgeloop omdat ek kon sien hoe gaande mense oor hom was. Beroemde mense en sterre onder sy vriende het almal gehelp om groot skenkings te lok en hulle was mense wat op hul eie onkoste gereis en van hul tyd aan hom afgestaan het sonder om 'n duit te vra, omdat hulle Madiba wou vereer en om aandag op sy werk te help vestig. Ja, hulle het ook munt geslaan uit die geleentheid; die een hand was die ander.

Die konsert die volgende aand was net so 'n groot sukses, hoewel die reis te veel geword het vir Madiba. Hy was moeg. Daar was altyd 'n stormloop mense wat hom wou groet. Ek het dit van 'n afstand

bekyk omdat ek kon sien daar sou ’n geveg uitbreek tussen dié wat ’n kans kry om hom te groet en dié wat nie. Ek het baie baie jammer vir hom gevoel omdat hy maar net die musiek en optrede van die Suid-Afrikaanse, Afrika- en internasionale kunstenaars wou geniet. Ek onthou dat ons ’n vertoning van ’n Suid-Afrikaanse popgroep met die naam Mafikizolo in Tromsø, Noorweë, bygewoon het en hoe hy dit geniet het dat hulle vir hom op ’n internasionale verhoog optree. En hierdie keer was dit immers sy verjaardag.

Voordat Madiba op die verhoog gestap het, het ’n klein vroutjie my genader wat ek nie dadelik herken het nie as Emma Bunton, wat voorheen vir die Spice Girls gesing het. Sy was een van die sterre wat aankondigings en verklarings tydens die konsert gemaak het. Sy het vir een van die verhoogbestuurders gesê sy dring daarop aan om persoonlik haar geskenk aan Madiba te oorhandig voor of nadat hy op die verhoog stap. Dit was ’n enorme kardoes. Ek kon my nie verbeel dat sý so ’n groot kardoes met ’n geskenk in die hele aand met haar sou saamdra nie. Verder was ek ook nog vies vir die Spice Girls nadat ek verneem het hulle spog daarmee dat hulle toiletpapier uit Madiba se ampswoning gesteel het terwyl hulle hom besoek het toe hy nog president was. Ek was dus nie baie positief oor Emma se teenwoordigheid nie. Ek het haar nie toegelaat om vir hom die geskenk te gee nie, want sy hande moes te alle tye vry wees.

Toe sy op die verhoog stap, kon ek sien sy was ontsteld en ek het vir ons veiligheidsmense gesê hulle moet ’n ogie op haar hou sodat sy nie haar pad na hom toe kon oopdwing terwyl kunstenaars uit Afrika agtertoe geskuif word nie. Miskien was sy heeltemal onskuldig, maar in daardie omstandighede staan jy sterk en sê selfs vir sterre wat hulle moet doen. Deel van my pligte was om proaktief te wees en te probeer verseker dat situasies opgelos word nog voor hulle gebeur. Ek het geweet Madiba sou wou hê dat die deelnemers uit Afrika ’n prominente rol moet speel terwyl hy op die verhoog is, en ek wou seker maak hy is nie ontsteld as die teenoorgestelde gebeur nie. Toe Madiba op die verhoog stap, het die skare ontplof. Party mense het gehuil en die geraas was oorverdowend. Ek was oorweldig van opgewondenheid en geluk vir hom.

Druk het op Madiba toegeneem van die media en die publiek om standpunt in te neem teen die growwe verwaarlosing van menseregte

in Zimbabwe onder president Robert Mugabe. Ons het die wêreldwye druk op Madiba vermy weens die kritiek wat hy in die verlede op die lyf geloop het omdat daar gevoel is hy werk onafhanklik van die regering en dat sy optrede met die diplomatieke proses inmeng. Uiteindelik het hy hierdie eenvoudige stelling gemaak: 'Nader aan die huis het ons gesien hoe geweld uitbreek teenoor ons mede-Afrikane in ons eie land, en hoe leierskap in ons naburige Zimbabwe tragies misluk.' En minder woorde het meer betekenis gehad, en deur sekere dinge weg te laat, het hy ander dinge gesê. Die pers het na hierdie sin gegryp en dit was 'n hele paar dae lank hoofnuus.

Die volgende dag het Madiba ook 'n paar van sy ou kollegas ontmoet, almal mense wat in die 1960's saam met hom in die Rivonia-verhoor was. Dit was meer as veertig jaar sedert die verhoor waartydens Madiba lewenslank tronk toe gestuur is, en daar was party van hulle wat hy sedert daardie tyd nie gesien het nie. Hy kon almal duidelik onthou en het dit baie geniet om saam met hulle te wees. Hier het hulle in die Dorchester-hotel in Londen tee gedrink nadat hulle mekaar die laaste keer as gevangenes in selle gesien het terwyl hulle verhoorafwagtend was. Tuis het die Nelson Mandela-stigting ook private vieringe gereël saam met sy voormalige politieke kollegas van die Rivonia-verhoor en medegevangenes wat steeds gelewe en in Suid-Afrika gewoon het. Dit was ontroerend om hierdie mense te sien waar hulle saamkom en ek het gewens ek kon ure lank met sommige van hulle gesels, want ek wou vir hulle soveel vrae vra. Die gesprek is oorheers deur 'het jy so en so gesien?' en 'wat het met so en so gebeur?'

Sy negentigste verjaardagviering in Londen was die volmaakte einde aan sy internasionale verskynings. Twintig jaar vroeër is sy sewentigste verjaardag in die Wembly-stadion in Engeland gevier en deur meer as seshonderd miljoen mense wêreldwyd gesien. Daardie konsert is Free Mandela genoem en twee jaar later was hy 'n vry man. Al was hierdie vieringe kleiner, was dit 'n gepaste manier om ons reise af te sluit omdat hy by kon wees waar hulle sy lewe vier. Daarna het ons nooit weer oorsee gereis nie. Hy was te oud daarvoor.

Madiba het my soms van die huis af gebel om te sê hy gaan die hysbak na die grondverdieping van sy huis neem. Hy was bang hy sit in die hysbak vas en ek moes hom tien minute later bel om seker te

maak alles is in die haak. Ek het nie geweet hoekom hy nie 'n ander lid van sy personeel by sy huis of sy kinders of kleinkinders gevra het om te help nie. Destyds het ek gedink dis snaaks, maar nou maak dit my hartseer om daaraan te dink. Om daar te wees om al die oproepe te beantwoord het my nog liewer vir hom gemaak. Dalk die feit dat hy so op my gesteun het, al is dit presies daardie bewondering en liefde wat soveel vyandigheid veroorsaak het.

Die oproepe het my ook herinner hoe oud hy geword het. Net 'n paar jaar tevore sou hy almal om hom veilig laat voel het as hulle in 'n hysbak sou vassit. Dit het voorheen in Kampala saam met die adjunkpresident van Uganda gebeur. Benewens die mense wat saam met hom moes wees, sou daar natuurlik altyd diegene wees wat probeer om saam met hom in 'n hysbak in te pas. Ek het vasgekeer gevoel en die trappe gebruik. Soos die duiwel dit wou hê, het hy daardie dag in Kampala vasgesit. Ons het twintig minute lank buite gestaan en wag vir 'n tegniese span om tot die redding te kom. Toe die hysbak uiteindelik oopgaan, was die adjunkpresident paniekbevange en 'n bietjie verleë, maar Madiba se humorsin het almal vermaak.

Mevrou Machel het my geleer om net getrou aan myself te wees en altyd te onthou dat my verhouding met Madiba belangrik was en dat ek nie verantwoordelik gehou kan word vir ander mense se verhoudings met hom nie. Wanneer ek iets doen, moes ek na my innerlike stem luister, wat altyd vir my sou sê wat is reg en wat is verkeerd. As ek besorg was oor iets of as iets my gepla het, was daar gewoonlik rede vir my gevoelens en ek moes die keuse maak wat my die veiligste sou laat voel. Ek en mevrou Machel het deur die jare nie altyd 'n maklike verhouding gehad nie. Ek was baie sensitief oor die feit dat 'n jong vrou soos ek soveel tyd saam met haar man deurgebring het; 'n wit vrou het vir hulle gesê wanneer hulle moet opstaan en wanneer hulle moet ontspan. En dit kon nie maklik gewees het om heeltyd mense om jou te hê nie. Maar tog is sy die een mens wat waardering en respek aan my getoon en my waardig laat voel het. Ek salueer haar tienduisend keer omdat sy kalm gebly het en vir my al die dinge geleer het wat sy het.

In die tyd rondom Madiba se negentigste verjaardag het ons ook seker gemaak hy eet saam met baie van sy oudkollegas en kamerade, personeellede en vriende en kleiner groepies. Hy het ook 'n stel seëls

van die Poskantoor ontvang wat in ’n beperkte oplaag gedruk is ter herdenking van sy verjaardag. Twee van my gunsteling-portrette van Madiba is op die seëls.

Hy het middagete saam met drie van sy voormalige ANC-dames, Barbara Masekela, Jessie Duarte en Frene Ginwale, geniet en daarna ook saam met die sangeresse Dorothy Masuka, Miriam Makeba, Abigail Kubeka en Tandie Klaasen, wat kunstenaars van sy generasie was. Op 2 Augustus het hy ’n ANC-byeenkoms in sy eer bygewoon waar almal saam met hom feesgevier het. Die regering wou ook ’n konsert vir die mense gehou het, maar daar is te laat met advertensies begin en die bywoning was nie goed nie. Die 16 Junie-stigting is ook toegelaat om ’n standbeeld aan Madiba te oorhandig. 16 Junie is Jeugdag in Suid-Afrika ter herinnering aan die begin van die Soweto-onluste van 1976. Dit was ’n pragtige standbeeld van Hector Pieterson en ek was ontroer toe Madiba dit ontvang het. Een van die direksielede het vir my gesê hoe dankbaar hulle was dat ek na Madiba omgesien het en ek het dit werklik waardeer, komende van ’n organisasie soos hulle s’n wat geskep is om mense te herinner aan die gebeure wat tot dié noodlottige dag in 1976 gelei het. Ons het ’n ver pad gekom in hierdie land. Ek was ’n Afrikaner en hier het hulle my bedank.

Dit was in hierdie tyd dat Madiba die droom gehad het dat ek bedank en ’n ander pos aanvaar het. Die volgende dag het hy in die kantoor baie ernstig vir my gesê hy het gedroom ek versaak hom. Ek, Zelda la Grange? Ek het hom gerusgestel dat ek dit nooit, ooit sou doen nie. Ek het my onsekerhede oorbrug en ek was vasbeslote om hom te dien tot die dag van my of sy dood.

PART FOUR
What Next?

2009–2013

11

Staying Until the End

It was January again and the house in Houghton needed to be closed to enable the staff to go on holiday. We had no idea of where to take Madiba. It was difficult to take him to a hotel and we either had to find a big-enough room where he could be indoors all day or a private place where he could move outdoors without being in public. Challenging! And so the idea came up of taking him to Sun City. It is merely a thirty-minute flight from Johannesburg and he wasn't keen on going too far.

First I received a call from one of his daughters complaining, 'How can you take Madiba there?' As if the decision had been mine. I referred it to Mrs Machel. Only once his daughter understood that the Presidential suite was being offered to him free of charge, and that the three-room suite was big enough for him not to feel isolated in and that he could sit outside out of the public eye, did she settle.

In Sun City on one of the mornings Mrs Machel and I had agreed to go walking for exercise. My cellphone rang at 7 a.m. and I thought she was going to postpone our exercise. I thought it was strange that she didn't call my hotel room, but as I answered my cellphone I smiled as I was preparing for her to say that she would sleep in. She didn't. She just said: 'Zelda come quickly, bring the doctor.' I ran down the corridor as fast as I could. I knocked on the doctor's door and yelled at him 'Harold come quickly.' He was dressed and without me explaining anything he grabbed his bag and we ran off to the suite grabbing one of our bodyguards too almost in mid-flight. Madiba had slipped and fallen on the bathroom floor and hit his head against something. It wasn't serious but a head wound bleeds excessively. We helped and the doctor immediately did all tests needed, cleaned the wound and

reported to Dr Plit, the physician in Johannesburg. When Madiba was finally on the bed with the doctor treating him, he saw me moving in and out of his room and his face lit up and he said, 'Oh Zeldina, you are here.' If ever I had thought to leave, that was the day I decided to stay until the end.

Unconsciously my body went into shock. I have never had such a big fright in my entire life and my shoulder and neck went into spasm. It took me three weeks of treatment of every kind possible to get rid of it – massages, acupuncture, medication, nothing helped. Mrs Machel was in trouble too. The family was furious and wanted to blame her for taking Madiba to Sun City and for his falling. He could have slipped anywhere and that is just the way it was. Old people fall. Period.

* * *

Madiba was no longer talkative every day; he was becoming more reserved. Whenever he was at the office – occasions that became few and far between – he would sit quietly by himself, thinking and only really converse on days that he felt strong and talkative. I always had to make sure that someone sat with him, whether he just read papers or wanted to be quiet in his chair. He did love interacting with all the colleagues at the Foundation and whenever new staff joined I made a point of introducing them. I also made sure everyone greeted him whenever he visited the office so that he could feel a sense of belonging. He had standard jokes for some of the staff. To Maretha, when she was pregnant with her first child, he would repeatedly ask, 'How many babies are you expecting?' because she is of small frame and carried large during her pregnancy. To Vimla, Mrs Machel's assistant, he would say, 'You appear to have grown taller,' because Vimla is short.

On a few occasions he would catch me by surprise when he said: 'Oh Zeldina, we have been together for a long time, haven't we?' And I would smile at his peculiar choice of words. What he meant was that we had been working together for a long time. If you work for someone for that long, you no longer need a detailed explanation for everything they say and you are familiar with intent. I would respond: 'Yes, Khulu, we have. We've now worked together for fifteen or sixteen years', and my answer would be met by a surprised 'Gee whiz'. I never asked why he was so surprised about the years we'd worked

together, if he had expected me to leave earlier or whether he was surprised that time had gone by so fast.

* * *

Over the years we had built a close relationship with Morgan Freeman and his business partner Lori McCreary. We occasionally saw them during trips when we were abroad or whenever they visited South Africa. In Monaco they attended our fundraising event and told us that Clint Eastwood had agreed to direct the movie they were planning to make about the 1995 Rugby World Cup in South Africa. It was to be called Invictus, named after the poem Madiba recited in prison, which ends 'I am the master of my fate: / I am the captain of my soul'. Teams of people from Hollywood visited South Africa in preparation of the film and I would often meet with them to direct them to people who could assist or help with logistics. They also asked if I would be willing to assist them in Morgan's interpretation of Madiba's character. I read the script and agreed to help. I wanted as much as them for the movie to be a success even though I did not play a prominent role in Madiba's office in 1995.

After asking for help from the Presidency at the Union Buildings the pre-production team was allowed to do a site inspection. The Foundation also supported them with research and I gave them legitimate examples of letterheads and access cards and drew plans of the layout of the office. I knew they would get it right, but I didn't realize that when Hollywood recreates, they do it perfectly. When I walked onto the set on the first day, I walked into a replica of Madiba's first house in Houghton. I was finding my way through the crew and stood behind a half-open door until they could give me the green light to enter the set. Then, unannounced, I heard Madiba in the room next door. My instinctive thought: What is he doing here? and then I realized that it was Morgan doing a scene of Madiba sitting in the lounge of his house. It was scary to hear as he sounded exactly like Madiba. Over the years we all commented that the older Morgan grew the more he started looking like Madiba.

I only stayed for the day on the set and helped with small things that I picked up around the house or in Morgan's interpretation of 'Madiba's role' that could be improved. Morgan was the perfect Madiba and for someone who knows Madiba fairly well it was the closest to him that we've seen portrayed in a movie. The only thing I

could really help Morgan with was some small mannerisms which he quickly picked up. He was crossing his legs too often or using his hands too expressively.

It was exciting but soon the day was over and I had to return to Johannesburg. I could only take a day's leave but soon when more scenes around Madiba or bodyguards were being shot, I took more leave and joined the crew, trying to assist them and pointing out whenever I thought something could be done differently to make it even more authentic.

* * *

During Madiba's ninetieth-birthday celebrations we had asked people, friends, ordinary people to send messages of congratulations to Madiba which we would put in a book for him to keep, together with the pictures to remind him of the celebrations in Hyde Park. One such note was a letter from Bono. He wrote: 'Happy Birthday Madiba. I am working to make July 18th a public holiday in every country that acknowledges that the struggle of Nelson Mandela is not over until every individual who yearns for freedom has the chance to grasp it. I believe your birthday should be an occasion around the globe to honour those who still struggle.' Tim Massey and I looked at the note and smiled. There was much more to this than what met the eye. How do we achieve this? We toyed a bit with the idea, and after consulting Fink Haysom, Madiba's legal adviser during his Presidency who now worked at the United Nations, the Foundation and 46664 decided to ask the South African Ambassador to the UN to put forward a proposal to the UN to declare 18 July International Nelson Mandela Day.

The UN unanimously accepted the proposal and the resolution was passed. Our Ambassador to the UN, Baso Sangqu, was outstanding in lobbying with his fellow ambassadors to gain their support. We were extremely proud when we were told that the resolution had been accepted and although 18 July was not to be a public holiday, it was declared a day of service for people to make a difference worldwide in their own environments. Even though Bono refused to take credit for the idea I often remind him that his sometimes crazy ideas make the world a better place and this was the perfect example.

* * *

We held another 46664 fundraiser in New York to raise money for the Foundation, but it was difficult. We were trying to raise money during a world economic recession and it was our first attempt at fundraising without Madiba being present. People were not keen to be seen to be ostentatious during a financial crisis, not even for charity, and again most people who attended were the people who we always relied on. The fundraiser wasn't a big success but we had prepared ourselves for that. The good part about it was that a boyfriend at the time accompanied me for the first time abroad, at our own expense of course. For the first time in sixteen years I had someone to turn to at night when the work was finished.

The loneliest part of my job over the years had been the nights alone in hotels across the world. I had had the odd boyfriend, relationship or fling over the years but no one really understood my environment. There was also the constant thought and occurrence of people befriending me for the wrong reasons, whether it was to get a book signed, to benefit from my contacts or to meet interesting people. After a few disappointments I started behaving like a modern version of a recluse. Hence I was always alone. There was no one to call and no one to say goodnight to, so you tend to turn to your job and become even more focused and almost emotionally reliant on what the job offers you to compensate for that loneliness. I think at some point it became less complicating to share my life with someone. I didn't have to find excuses to work or be so dedicated, and although the freedom allowed me to grow as a person, I had missed the sharing and caring from a soulmate. This time it was different.

For year end the plan was that Madiba would spend a few days in Shambala for him and Mrs Machel to rest, and to give the staff at the Houghton house the opportunity to take leave. It was becoming clear towards the end of our stay in Shambala that Madiba was getting older much faster than we anticipated and his strength was deteriorating.

Madiba no longer moved easily by himself. Something was bothering him. Near the end of the trip he awoke one morning in a bad mood. He refused to eat and wanted to leave the farm immediately. 'Mum,' he said to Mrs Machel, 'we have a crisis.' Mum and I questioned him about the crisis but he wouldn't tell us what it was. And then he would start again: 'Mum, can you not see the crisis?' Madiba insisted he leave immediately. He usually flew to Shambala by military helicopter. The drive to Johannesburg was too far for him. It

was the holidays and finding pilots to act on such short notice was difficult. Douw Steyn, the owner of Shambala, was on the farm too and Mum asked him to help find a helicopter.

In the meantime some of the security called Makaziwe, Madiba's eldest daughter, in Johannesburg to report that Madiba insisted on leaving immediately. Makaziwe called Mum and instructed her: 'Release my father now . . . release my father.' I could hear it all on the phone standing next to Mrs Machel. I cringed. We were trying to ascertain what the crisis was that Madiba was referring to. We were also waiting for Douw to help organize a helicopter. The next minute the security pulled up in their convoy, loaded Madiba in the car and started driving him back to Johannesburg. Panic struck. Never before had the security abandoned or left Mrs Machel behind. Madiba was not registering clearly what was happening. Mrs Machel, a former First Lady of South Africa and the wife of Madiba, was left stranded at Shambala without any security or transport. Between Josina (her daughter) and me we had to figure out how to get her home.

In the meantime Douw had managed to organize a helicopter and he was chasing the convoy from mid-air. Not knowing how the South African Police Force operated, he instructed the helicopter to land on the highway – not realizing that the helicopter would probably be shot at by the bodyguards. The farm manager, Tinus Nel, sped behind the convoy trying to catch it to communicate Douw's plans to them and only when the convoy stopped at the KFC drive-through in a nearby town, to apparently buy KFC for Madiba for lunch, did he manage to catch them. The helicopter was diverted and Douw was asked to fly to Johannesburg to meet Madiba there.

When Madiba left Shambala he was furious, but none of us understood what the furore was about. All he repeated was that there was a crisis. Little did we know that Madiba had had a vision of the years that lay ahead for him. That of ill-health and suffering. He knew his body was changing but he was unable to tell us what he felt.

I had been angry on many occasions over the previous sixteen years but at some point laughter at the irony takes over from anger. Some of us had spent those many previous years looking out for Madiba, caring for him, making sure that he ate the right food at the right time, that he was treated with dignity and that things happened according to his wishes, and then suddenly the situation changes, and you are on the outside looking in. I had never imagined that anyone would take Madiba to a drive-through KFC, but suddenly that was

happening.

He arrived home while we were still trying to pack up in Shambala and rush Mrs Machel to Johannesburg. Shortly after Madiba's arrival, Douw arrived at the Houghton house too and then Makaziwe arrived. Madiba was deeply disturbed, and still not able to verbalize his frustration. But he chased everyone except Douw out of the house. 'Get out!' he said. 'Get out!' and they left. Madiba said he didn't want anyone interfering with his business.

At times like these when Madiba got angry I honestly feared for his health. He got so angry that I sometimes thought he was close to having a stroke. A day or so passed and Madiba calmed down again, and they soon left for Qunu where they had planned to spend Christmas.

* * *

Early in 2010 we were approached by the organizers of the Top Gear show in South Africa and asked whether the Foundation would consider partnering with them and in turn they would then make us the beneficiaries of their fundraiser. The request went, like all requests, past our committee, consisting of the CEO, Chairman and some senior staff members, and finally we asked Madiba whether he would be interested in meeting them. Upon running down their credentials he agreed. The organizers, contrary to what was subsequently reported in the media, asked whether Jeremy Clarkson and his team could pay a courtesy call to Madiba. Seeing that Top Gear is the most viewed TV show on earth we agreed, under condition that the Foundation would be featured somehow as it provided a platform to introduce the Centre of Memory's work, hoping to secure Madiba's legacy into the future, to the world. All parties agreed. On the night of the fundraiser around 800,000 rand was raised and we were happy. Despite promises of Clarkson and James May attending the event, they were nowhere to be seen. I had hoped to meet them to get a sense of them as they were paying their courtesy call to Madiba the following day. Personally I had always been a fan of Top Gear.

On the same day as the fundraiser, Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on the moon, in 1969, visited Madiba. Madiba was imprisoned in 1969 but he remembered the prison warders telling them about it as they had no access to newspapers or a radio at the time, and of course no television. As opposed to many other meetings at the time,

Madiba found it very curious and captivating to engage with Mr Armstrong. Mr Armstrong had been a recluse most of his life and we didn't know much about him. I was inquisitive about the reality of his life after such an extraordinary experience and he was eager to share his experiences with us. I was fascinated and almost in awe of him and asked him the strangest questions once Madiba ran out of questions himself. Madiba found it most intriguing. Neil Armstrong was a gentle soul and one could sense in his character that he had a different understanding of life having gone through such an experience. He was also elderly, and it was easy for Madiba to relate to him. This has to be one of my top ten moments with Madiba, seeing the two of them conversing as elderly men, exchanging their most awkward life experiences.

I knew that Jeremy Clarkson was humorous but I thought he had tact. As he walked into Madiba's office the next day he asked Madiba if he had ever had a lap dance. I thought it completely inappropriate for him to ask something like that to an elderly statesman and Madiba looked at me as if he expected me to answer. I turned to Madiba and said: 'You don't have to answer that, Khulu.' I looked at Jeremy and I was on guard. He could see that I thought it was a stupid question to put to a ninety-one-year-old.

They took their seats and I reminded Madiba who they were, obviously explaining that they had the most popular show on TV and recited the number of viewers worldwide and elaborated a bit. He listened and took note and entertained what they said. They handed him their books and he paged through them. He didn't feel like conversation and appeared a bit withdrawn.

The first problem, which I was not aware of at the time, was that Clarkson thought Madiba had asked to see them and Madiba thought they had asked to see him. Jeremy then asked Madiba whether he often came to the office and Madiba said no, it was his first day in the office for the year. Yet I knew that it was reported in the papers that he had met Eddie Izzard and Armstrong the previous day. I corrected him as I usually did and said: 'No Khulu, remember you were here yesterday. You met Neil Armstrong, remember he was so interesting as he told us about his trip to the moon.' Madiba responded and said: 'Oh yes that's correct, now I remember.' Looking at Clarkson and May he had little else to say to them and jokingly asked, 'Have you ever been to the moon?' He was trying to crack a joke and if Jeremy could make jokes out of line, surely Madiba could make a joke too?

Yet later, Clarkson wrote an article in which he very inappropriately said that Madiba mistook him for Neil Armstrong, which was definitely not the case. He may not have known who Clarkson was, but he definitely didn't confuse him for someone else. Theirs was an underestimation of Madiba's intelligence because he was old. In my view, there was no respect.

Added to that, the organizers met with us a few days later and told us that the close to 800,000 rand we thought was raised during the fundraiser, and which was reported to have been raised for the Nelson Mandela Foundation, was not entirely all ours. They still had to offset the costs of the dinner and event and then we would be left with about half the money. I was furious. In terms of governance it created difficulties for us. It subsequently all appeared in the Mail and Guardian newspapers in South Africa and I came across as an utter bitch towards the organizers, but I didn't mind a bit. I was just sick and tired of, as it seemed to me, people taking advantage of Madiba and us and people pussy-footing around issues rather than saying it straight. The Foundation did accept the money but we had to follow up with each of the buyers separately. It created hassle and was far away from what we believed the arrangement to be. Coupled with what I felt was utter disrespect for the Foundation, it was a difficult pill to swallow. People later asked how we could have allowed Clarkson to meet with Madiba, but we followed due process and the matter was discussed with all Madiba's advisers and at the time, like in many other cases, what was presented on paper – and more specifically the opportunity to showcase the work of the Foundation to an international audience – appeared advantageous. It was not all about the money but about the promise of giving much needed exposure to the work of trying to preserve Nelson Mandela's legacy. And so you learn . . .

* * *

In 2010 South Africa hosted the FIFA World Cup. Madiba was only visiting the office occasionally. He was starting to show signs of his age. We were not surprised but the public was. He was more forgetful and sometimes he didn't feel like seeing people or getting up. Other days he would not want to be isolated and he would ask to see people. Most days he wanted to spend time at home resting. Soon we were overwhelmed by artists, visitors, tourists and every head of state

present in South Africa for the World Cup all wanting to pay a courtesy call on Madiba. It was impossible for him to grant all these appointments and we decided to close his diary in fear that he may be too exhausted by the time of the opening ceremony, which he was meant to attend.

And then there was FIFA. We joked that we felt invaded by this world body and I decided that FIFA was not a worldwide football organization but a country by itself. But they were particularly accommodating as far as the planning around Madiba's attendance at the opening ceremony. Generally people in South Africa felt that the World Cup cost the country too much money as we had to invest a lot on the infrastructure to deal with the number of visitors. The majority of people in South Africa still lived in poverty even though it was sixteen years since the ANC took power. Delivery of basic services was slow due to the frequent and diverse challenges faced by a developing country, and even while we were promised good returns on social responsibility projects from FIFA for hosting the World Cup soccer there was little proof of that at the time, or since.

I thought I enjoyed a generally good relationship with FIFA officials, regardless of friction sometimes over them wanting to overburden Madiba. I attended many meetings in preparation of the opening ceremony where all involved parties would be present. Afterwards I would put Madiba's needs to the executive and they changed and adapted plans to work for him. Of course they were desperate to have him appear and 'endorse' the opening of the tournament but I also wanted to believe that they honestly cared enough to really accommodate all his needs. I was extremely open to Danny Jordaan, who was the CEO of the Local Organizing Committee in South Africa, and FIFA executives about the need to avoid exploiting Madiba and about the difficulties involved in him attending a function like this in the middle of winter.

All presidents and deputy presidents in South Africa have a team of medical staff that move with them. This privilege was also extended to Madiba whenever we travelled abroad, even past his retirement from public office. As his age progressed the team became more prominent, and by the time he was ninety-two they accompanied us even to all local events. After one of the briefing meetings to prepare for the opening ceremony Jérôme Valcke, the CEO of FIFA, called me aside and told me that he had received a call from the Surgeon General, responsible for Madiba's health care. However, it wasn't the

Surgeon General that had called but General Dabula, the Surgeon General's second-in-command and the person overseeing the medical care of all the former presidents. Until that point we mostly saw General Dabula whenever an important visitor came around to see Madiba.

Jérôme told me that he had received instructions from General Dabula that he (Dabula) was the only one to decide anything about Madiba's movements. His decision was that upon arrival Madiba would go to SAFA House, the office building close to the stadium which housed the South African Football Association. Madiba would be taken to a holding room in Chairman Irvin Khoza's office, and then when the time came for him to go onto the field he would be taken to a golf cart and driven about a kilometre to the entrance of the stadium.

To me, it just didn't make sense in practical terms. Why would you drive an elderly person – in mid-winter – that far in an open golf cart? It was two days before the opening match that Jérôme received these instructions. I could see that he was puzzled. I had been working with them for years prior to the World Cup and now he received a call from someone he had never spoken to or seen before just two days before it began. Luckily, the Head of the Presidential Protection Unit, Brigadier Dladla, was also present during the meeting that had just adjourned. I called him and asked Jérôme to repeat the story, which he did. Brigadier Dladla would have none of it. Security had always decided on the means of transport and Madiba's movements, in accordance to the programme we developed.

I was stunned by this interference and the odd logic of their choices. Luckily, the matter was put to rest after Brigadier Dladla called General Dabula. But it was evident that there was a battle over authority. The medical staff under General Dabula felt, now, that they were the ultimate authority, while the security staff under Brigadier Dladla viewed themselves equally. Madiba's office had a long working relationship with his security teams and a respect and deep sense of understanding for our respective fields of expertise. It felt as though there was an attempt to undermine the authority of the Foundation and Madiba's office: the older he became and the less able to express his own wishes, the more people were going to move in and get him to do what they wanted him to do, serving their interests rather than his, although they might have seen these as the interests of the country. I was caught in the middle and I found it hard.

* * *

Sadly on the evening of the opening concert of the FIFA World Cup, prior to the day of the official opening of the tournament, Madiba's beloved great-granddaughter Zenani was tragically killed in a car accident. I woke up the next morning to a message from the Presidency asking whether the rumours were true. I checked and indeed it was the case. I was numbed with shock. Zenani was the sweetest, most loving child imaginable.

Hearing of Zenani Jnr's death I immediately assumed that Madiba would not be able to attend the opening ceremony. Yet I was receiving confusing reports. Mrs Machel had left the house to go and support the family and I couldn't reach her immediately. When she called she said that the family had met and decided Madiba should not go. Barely thirty minutes later I received a call from the household telling me that Madiba was definitely going. When I asked how this had come about I was told that some of the staff at the house went to convince Madiba to make a short appearance. I called again to check who was at the house and it seemed that between the medical staff and security they had convinced Madiba that the world was waiting to see him. Indeed the world was and they were playing the guilt card, but they were looking for a way to go to the opening ceremony themselves and by convincing Madiba to go, they would get in clearly at the expense of him and his family during such a challenging time for them. I was spitting fire. I reported this to Mrs Machel again and when she arrived home she resolved the issue. Until minutes before the opening ceremony people were trying to change plans to get Madiba to go.

It was becoming clear that the struggle for authority over what Madiba got to do and what he didn't was going to be a tough battle. Madiba didn't go but appropriately attended a vigil with the family. The battle for authority was exhausting. The medical staff clearly had the desire to assert their authority in Madiba's life. Those who have served Madiba for years were steadily being sidelined. Little did I know what lay ahead. At the time I felt for Madiba. I imagined him feeling like an antelope hit by a vehicle, confused, being pushed around by people and no longer being able to have a clear sense of reason himself.

Despite this sad day for us all, the country exploded with excitement as the first match kicked off at Soccer City. Again South Africa was a united nation. Sport brought us all together and after a

successful opening match people dispelled fears of failure. There were tourists everywhere and business was blooming. Flags of each country hung everywhere and people draped their cars and houses with the flag of the country they supported.

Zenani's funeral was the week after the opening game. Two weeks later, while I attended a match with the Clintons, my grandmother also sadly passed away. I had two sad funerals during the World Cup and it left me with mixed emotions; I found it difficult to be swept away by the national celebrations. Mrs Machel and Josina attended my grandmother's funeral in Pretoria. My family was extremely touched and grateful. Never ever had I expected that they would take the time and make the effort to drive that far to support me or my family. She was the last of my grandparents and regardless of the fact that I felt a bit bitter about her putting my mother through the trauma of having to go into an orphanage, I was nevertheless very, very sad about her passing. My wonderful mother didn't have grudges and was very close to my grandmother. She was with Grandma right to the end.

Mrs Machel comes through at the most surprising times and she has a motherly instinct to know when one needs her support. It made me think about support for her. Madiba was getting older and it was becoming difficult for her too, to see her husband ageing. She is not a machine and she needs support as well. She has been there for me at times when I was heartbroken about boyfriends that left me, or when life was simply getting too much. More so than any other person.

Madiba's entire being was based on respect. Respect for your friends, respect for the enemy, for those poorer than you, those worse dressed and those less educated, and even those who harmed you or those who made mistakes. But also for those more powerful, those wealthier and smarter than you. There was not one day that I felt that Madiba disrespected me because I was a lesser person than him, knew less, earned less, knew so little about life and sometimes, yes, well, was so stupid. Not one day. Not one occasion. Mrs Machel is the one person who made Madiba truly happy and just for that she deserved respect if there was ever any doubt that she earned or demanded it. She deserved it.

* * *

In May I decided that I had to do something for Mandela Day. After

toying with an idea with a colleague, Sello Hatang, I decided to organize a ride with a group of motorbike riders. The idea would be for a representative group to ride between Johannesburg and Cape Town (approximately 1,400 km) to advocate for Mandela Day. Along the way we would stop at charity projects where we could offer sixty-seven minutes to support the charity. Mandela Day is an ethos we can all subscribe to in honour of Madiba. It is a day of service and Madiba, having spent sixty-seven years fighting social injustice, asks only sixty-seven minutes of your time. The idea was also to demonstrate to people that if we all do just that, we can change the world for the better.

Between the pressures of the World Cup I was also looking after business people who visited South Africa for the tournament as well as organizing the bike trip. I had started a business the year before specifically catering for VIPs' logistical needs whenever they travelled to South Africa. My role at the office was slowly diminishing and I had to keep busy, which made me decide to start the business. During the World Cup I took on a few such high profile clients and my time and energy was thinly spread amongst all my responsibilities.

The day after the tournament ended, our bike trip departed from the Foundation in the cold of mid-winter. It was enjoyable and a great success, and seeing that Morgan Freeman and his business associate Lori McCreary were in South Africa for the World Cup, they too accompanied us on the bike trip. The trip was successful and we got coverage for Mandela Day countrywide, and on international networks worldwide. And, most importantly, we touched thousands of lives. It is something I hoped to continue into the future. The entire group felt good at the end of the ride. We felt like we really made a difference to people's lives.

* * *

On the Thursday before the final of the tournament, Madiba indicated that he definitely wanted to attend the closing match or at least make an appearance, as he'd been unable to attend the opening match due to the death of Zenani Jnr. I informed all parties about his wishes. We had to put all mechanisms in place again for an appearance.

On the Sunday of the closing match we finally had all arrangements in place for Madiba to go onto the pitch at the closing ceremony to at least wave to the crowd. He was excited but it was

winter and we knew to make his appearance as short as possible. Upon our arrival at the stadium, General Dabula and the entire Defence Force top brass were there waiting for Madiba. I couldn't see why as they were all line managers and were not going to deal with any situation, if anything happened, themselves. While the security team had prepared a particular golf cart for Madiba the medical team had prepared another. The power struggle started. General Dabula insisted that he accompany Madiba on the golf cart to take the 50-metre drive onto the pitch. The security didn't agree but kept quiet. That arrangement would also mean that there wouldn't be space on the golf cart for Mrs Machel. I wouldn't hear of this and a huge altercation broke out. All the staff were young and fit enough to walk next to the golf cart, if there was any need for them to. In any event, if anything ever happened to a VIP in public you would not deal with the matter there but would rather take him/her to a safe place. Why would Mrs Machel's seat need to be compromised for medical staff? They would have to shoot me to give in on that one. There was just no common sense in this proposal at all. By the time Madiba arrived it had still not been resolved.

The security and I insisted and I could sense the resentment from General Dabula. He wanted to have a final say but we would not make Madiba's life practically difficult to give in to his ways. As Madiba's name was announced the golf cart drove onto the pitch. Of course the cart was surrounded by security and a horde of medical staff. Even the top brass of the Defence Force medical fraternity. I stayed in the tunnel and witnessed the circus from a distance. The noise the crowd made became deafening when they noticed Madiba. He smiled and waved. He had his furry Russian hat on and was dressed in his favourite warm coat, scarf and gloves. Mum sat next to him and they both waved at the crowd. Madiba was happy. It was a befitting ending to his career in public. It was indeed the last time he ever appeared formally at a public event.

* * *

Towards the end of 2010 Madiba returned to Shambala to allow his household staff time off. Since Madiba no longer travelled and seldom went anywhere the staff at home were working round the clock. They were stretched to their limits and seriously needed a break. From Shambala they went to Qunu for family Christmas and I spent

Christmas with my family.

When I arrived in Cape Town in late December 2010 to be with Madiba and Mum over New Year, I was deeply concerned when I saw Madiba again. He had lost weight since I saw him two weeks before and he was extremely uncomfortable and edgy. When I left for the holiday he had great difficulty walking. I did, as usual, express concern about my boss to the medical staff and they just said to me, ‘Madiba is fine.’ It was clearly none of my business how my boss was doing.

Mrs Machel was concerned too but it was becoming clear that medical staff were now acting on instructions from certain Mandela family members and that introduced different priorities to those Mrs Machel felt were important for her husband. Sky News later reported that Madiba had bedsores. The Cape Town medics who acted independently were concerned and stressed.

Rodney, a paramedic in Cape Town, and I decided to go and do some shopping to buy medical equipment to make him more comfortable. The nurses and medical staff who accompanied him from Pretoria seemed uninterested in his condition and discomfort. The secretary, so often blamed for inefficiency, was now in cahoots with the Cape Town medics to investigate every possible way to attend to Madiba’s medical needs. The mere fact that I am not in a mental institution right now remains a wonder to me. Situations like these made me feel like I was going insane.

My first question was, if his care was in the hands of the government, why didn’t they provide these basics? Surely when a person becomes elderly his needs change and it was common sense that one had to continuously adapt the situation to make him as comfortable as possible. I once read in Madiba’s Conversations With Myself what he had said during a conversation with editor Richard Stengel: ‘I moved in circles where common sense and practical experience were important, and where high academic qualifications were not necessarily decisive.’ And yes, indeed, I have come to precisely that realization. There were certain instances where the common sense my dad had taught me became more decisive than my lack of degrees and academic qualification.

As days progressed things were deteriorating fast. The situation was reported to those in charge of Madiba’s care in Pretoria, General Dabula and Surgeon General Ramlakan. It was clear that Madiba needed a specialist to examine his knee.

In the meantime we realized that Madiba would not be able to return to Johannesburg on 11 January as was originally planned. He had great difficulty walking and we acquired a wheelchair to move him. It would not fit into the current elevator in the Johannesburg residence and it was necessary to replace the elevator with a larger model. That meant that the company installing it would have to enlarge the shaft for the bigger machine. Meme Kgagare, Madiba's Household Manager, and I contacted the company responsible for the installation of the original elevator and made arrangements for them to start work as soon as possible. Meme would keep us posted every day on the progress made in rebuilding the shaft. This would take time and we therefore needed to remain in Cape Town a little longer than expected. By then we were looking at a week's extension of our stay in Cape Town. The odd visitor came to see Madiba but as for the rest of the time an uncomfortable silence descended on the house.

On Wednesday, 13 January 2011, a specialist in orthopaedic surgery at 2 Military Hospital was ordered to come and examine Madiba. He entered the living room while Prof. Gerwel and I were with Madiba. He examined Madiba's knee and Madiba protested from the pain. The doctor requested the medics to take Madiba to the bedroom for a proper examination. He looked shocked when he appeared from the room. He said to us that he would be in touch but that he was concerned that there may be underlying problems that could be the cause of the deterioration we witnessed in Madiba in the past few weeks.

Mrs Machel was in Mozambique on this particular day as she had to prepare her family for her son paying labola (paying the price to marry a woman in African tradition). Mrs Machel's family hardly ever depended on her for time and attention but these were among the few occasions that her own children needed her presence in Mozambique. By now, General Dabula was in Cape Town too. The doctor briefed him and expressed his shock over the general care of Mr Mandela as a patient. He appealed to us to admit Madiba to the local Military Hospital in Cape Town – immediately. I indicated that Mrs Machel would return that night and that it was not a decision I could take, and that we would have to wait for her unless they insisted that it was an emergency.

General Dabula said he was more concerned that Madiba was homesick. He suggested that we fly in one of the housekeepers from Johannesburg. I told him that household affairs and the way staff

work rosters were determined were not medical matters nor my business, and that in my opinion Madiba had been homesick for almost two years. Anyone who spent enough time with Madiba knew that if he was in Johannesburg, he wanted to be in Qunu, if he was in Qunu he wanted to be in Johannesburg. If he was in Cape Town he wanted to be in Qunu or Johannesburg. It is just the way old people are. I advised that we leave household affairs to Mrs Machel and that he focus on the medical issues. I felt he was upset with me but I saw his actions as another symptom of disregard for Mrs Machel. There was always politics at the house, like there is in any working environment.

Mrs Machel arrived back late on the 14th but I had texted her to say that General Dabula and the specialist who had examined Madiba wanted to see her the next morning, and she agreed to meet at 11.00. By then I had learned that General Dabula had decided not to include the specialist who had examined Madiba but rather to bring in a third doctor, a physician by training. She had not seen Madiba before, yet she was asked to brief Mrs Machel despite never having examined the patient they were discussing.

After our gym session on Friday morning I walked Mrs Machel to her car. I told her that the specialist who had examined Madiba suspected some underlying problem which resulted in Madiba's rapid deterioration, and that they were going to suggest that Madiba be admitted to hospital that afternoon. I was increasingly becoming worried about her too. The constant stress of dealing with family politics put a strain on her and I feared that if she was caught by such a shock announcement that her husband had to be hospitalized she might end up having a stroke. We couldn't live without her being Mum and being there for Madiba. The doctors arrived at the house at 10.30, and after the discussion preparations were made and Madiba was taken to 2 Military Hospital to be admitted for a series of tests. More and more tests were done, including X-rays and scans.

I had often been told by some of the Mandela family members to stay out of Madiba's personal life, but I was extremely frustrated, as any layman could see that things were not being dealt with in the best possible way, and the constant need for the medical team to consider the internal family politics above the interest of the patient was clear. The doctors were also pertinently instructed by some of the Mandelas not to discuss any medical issues around Madiba with me. It was clear that me pointing out certain things was starting to irritate them.

Things went generally well in hospital but Madiba was uneasy as he had never liked hospitals. He didn't want to be there and he protested. On Saturday morning at about 6 a.m. I received a call from Madiba's long-serving loyal bodyguard and driver, Mike Maponya, who had been Madiba's driver since his release from prison. My heart came to a standstill. Mike didn't often call me and it was too early to receive an unimportant call from him. You expect the worst. Madiba wanted me to come to the hospital immediately. I still had to get dressed and make myself presentable and as a result I only arrived a little later. Madiba was furious at me. 'Zeldina, you, you of all people deserted me and left me here.' He had not spent a night in hospital in years and he detested it. Mike tried to diffuse the situation by telling Madiba that Mum was about to arrive at the hospital herself, as she was. I explained that the people were there to take care of him and to examine him to make sure he was OK but he wouldn't take any of it. Luckily Mrs Machel arrived soon and that calmed him down. It was difficult to see him as uneasy as that and I disappeared from the room as soon as I could find an opportunity. I couldn't bear seeing him not being well and so frustrated. The doctors were busy with him all the time and had several closed door discussions. I was relieved because I knew they were now paying full attention to him and he was in specialists' hands, which is all I really cared for.

* * *

General Dabula was nowhere to be seen and the GP on duty with Madiba was off sick with tonsillitis. It was of great concern to me that two of the key role players concerned with Madiba's health were absent. Mrs Machel informed Madiba's three daughters of their father's hospitalization and I informed Prof. Gerwel. I told Prof. that I was not alerting anyone at the Foundation as it was critical that we kept this under tight wraps or else we would be overwhelmed at the hospital by media and the public.

The Minister of Defence at the time, Lindiwe Sisulu, paid a visit to Madiba on Saturday night at hospital. She is the daughter of Madiba's late friends Walter and Albertina Sisulu and also a cousin of Makaziwe Mandela. In South Africa, the Ministry of Defence is responsible for the healthcare of heads of state and former heads of state. I wasn't there but Mrs Machel was and the Minister was also concerned about Madiba's well-being. Late on Saturday night rumours started doing the

rounds in the media that Madiba had passed away. The government wanted to issue a statement to say that Madiba was admitted to the military hospital in Cape Town for tests, but I advised against disclosing his whereabouts to give him privacy. They wanted to stop rumours from running that he had passed on.

In the meantime the Foundation contacted me to ask whether there was any substance to the rumours of Madiba's passing. I said: 'Madiba is alive, but please speak to Prof. for any other info.' I didn't want to be the one to give out information as I knew what could happen and I was often blamed for leaks to the media. We had already suspected that our phones were being monitored as confidential discussions somehow appeared to leak for inexplicable reasons. In instances like these it is better for senior officials to discuss the process. A statement was subsequently issued that read that Madiba was on holiday with his wife and there was no substance to the rumours that he had passed on. I advised the Presidency that such a statement had been issued and they decided not to issue their statement.

On Sunday Madiba was discharged after all the specialists saw him for the last examination. We arrived home around 1 p.m. to find the GP who had been off work because of tonsillitis at Madiba's house in Cape Town. I wondered to myself, couldn't she have gone to the hospital that morning to receive discharge instructions from the specialists if she was now well enough to come to Madiba's house? But if she was sick, surely it was not the best thing to be around Madiba? Aren't old people – especially in a vulnerable state of health – more susceptible to infections?

On Monday and Tuesday Madiba was showing progress. The medication was obviously starting to work. On Thursday morning I was eager to hear from the Doctor on duty how Madiba was but I was told by medical and security staff that the Doctor was not at work. When I asked where she was I was told that she had gone shopping. For me, this was too to much. How could shopping be a priority three days after Nelson Mandela had been discharged from hospital if you are the doctor? I was stepping way out of line to think that I could question the doctor for not being at work and soon I was reported to the family.

Mrs Machel left for the traditional wedding of her son, Malenga, in Maputo. She was told Madiba was OK and it was safe for her to leave, although we agreed that we would be in constant contact with one

another to update her on progress.

On Saturday Madiba's daughter Zenani was scheduled to arrive in Cape Town; Mrs Machel had asked her to come and be with her father while she attended the wedding in Mozambique. She arrived at the house around 10 a.m. and her father was not out of bed yet. The specialists were going to see Madiba at 11.00. Zenani, Shirley the housekeeper and I ended up chatting in the kitchen and lost track of the time. Sometime after 11.00 I enquired about the specialists and was told that they could not come to the house by themselves but were awaiting orders, like in any military bureaucracy, to be fetched from the hospital and brought to the house. When I called them and asked whether they couldn't drive themselves, I was told they were not allowed. I thought to myself: What if there was an emergency? Do we wait for Pretoria to issue orders for specialists in Cape Town to be fetched from the hospital because they are not allowed to drive there themselves?

* * *

I was stressed and beyond anxious about Madiba's health and went to see Prof. Gerwel at his office in Cape Town to tell him that the situation was turning for the worse and that we needed intervention. Because of all the politics within the medical team and family there was no way that anyone could make all parties agree to something. Prof. was my point of call on anything and everything. Madiba hardly ever took decisions without consulting or sound-boarding it to Prof. Prof. was Madiba's point of balance in a way. He knew exactly how to find mutually acceptable ground between what Madiba wanted to be done and what had to be done. I was one of the few people who could always get hold of Prof. irrespective of the time of day or night. He was engaged on many fronts but he knew that we depended on him with our lives. He also knew that whenever an emergency occurred he would be my first port of call. He offered to speak to the Minister of Defence, and they arranged to meet on Monday after Mrs Machel had returned from Maputo.

On Sunday when Mrs Machel returned, Madiba's situation had deteriorated further. Madiba didn't want to lose sight of any of us and insisted that someone stay with him all the time. He was pale and weak. He was seriously ill. I was prepared to say goodbye but not without giving this fight my last shot to ensure that everything in our

power was done to guarantee that he was in the best possible hands.

On Monday morning one of the specialists was dismissed because of disagreements over the best course of action with Madiba's care. Another specialist was flown from 1 Military Hospital in Pretoria to join the team. He examined Madiba and had some serious concerns. There was no way that we could fly home with Madiba in his current state. He advised that Madiba be taken to 2 Military Hospital again for a chest X-ray. I suspected that Madiba had pneumonia. Most deaths among old people are the result of septicaemia or pneumonia. In the meantime Mrs Machel, Minister Sisulu and Prof. Gerwel met and Mrs Machel provided details of the past weeks. Prof. Gerwel was as concerned as she and I about Madiba's health and care. Mrs Machel felt hopeless and undermined. Because I'd raised concerns and because the specialists were also all white, I felt that it also became a racial issue. There was no way out unless Prof., Mrs Machel and the Minister intervened.

The Minister explored the possibility of replacing the entire team, but Mrs Machel felt that they would (figuratively speaking) crucify her if she dared interfere with appointees endorsed by the family. It was clear to us all that, no matter who appointed who, Nelson Mandela was supposed to get expert attention and medical support. The Minister offered to put together an international team of specialists but Mrs Machel also guarded against something that could be seen as a vote of no confidence in our own medical practitioners in South Africa. She was right. We have some of the best medical specialists in the world.

By Tuesday the specialist from 1 Military Hospital had informed us that we would be going home on Wednesday. An ambulance plane was ordered from Pretoria to collect Madiba, equipped with emergency medical facilities to transport him home. I was informed by Maretha, my colleague who now dealt with logistics, that the plane could only accommodate four or five passengers due to the extra equipment on board, but that a second plane was chartered to transport the extra medical and security staff back to Pretoria.

On Tuesday morning I was sitting at the breakfast table with Mrs Machel and Ndaba, Madiba's grandson, who had arrived the previous day to look after his grandfather, when I briefed them both about the space in the plane so we could determine who got home on which plane. Ndaba said that he insisted that he be on the plane with Madiba as a family member had to be with him. Mrs Machel said that

they would sort out spaces once they got to the plane in the morning, but that the doctors should get priority. I felt deeply hurt for her because what Ndaba was saying was that she was not family. It's not the big things that hurt me, but these mundane things. And then of course how it would have hurt Madiba if he'd heard how his wife was being treated. I had already made plans to fly commercially as I knew too well not to get in the way. Mrs Machel asked whether I didn't want to reconsider and fly with the back-up plane but I declined, saying that it was better that there was extra space for whoever wanted it and I needn't get in the way too.

I sat with Madiba at some point with my legs crossed and he touched my leg almost to feel whether I was really there. Tears shot to my eyes and I had to get up to not show him how upset I was. He was no longer conversing and one could see he was terribly weak. I didn't know why he was not hospitalized but was told that we were flying to Johannesburg the following day where there would be a full team of medical specialists that could attend to him.

On Wednesday morning I arrived early at the house. Madiba was at the breakfast table and being attended to. I had coffee and something to eat and then decided to make my way to the airport for my flight back home. I greeted, starting with Mrs Machel, and after greeting Madiba I quickly turned around and walked out so that no one could see that I was crying. I thought I had said my final goodbyes. He was coughing non-stop.

I was anxious at the airport and called the security to tell me once Madiba's plane was in the air. The decision and agreement with the doctors was that Madiba would be taken home once he arrived in Pretoria, upon which Dr Mike Plit, Madiba's private physician for over twenty years, would come and examine him. Madiba literally trusted Dr Plit with his life. Whenever Madiba didn't want to eat, a loss of appetite that occurs with age, we would tell him that Dr Plit insisted that he ate three meals a day. And Dr Plit did. He would then oblige. The thought of Dr Plit being in Johannesburg, waiting to care for him, was therefore a consolation if there could be any in such circumstances.

My plane was delayed and Madiba's took off before I could board my commercial flight. I was tired and emotional and kept my sunglasses on, like a proper wannabe celebrity, to disguise my red-wept eyes. Rumours about his health had quietened down in the public and media and I didn't want to fuel any speculation if anyone I

knew came across me with my red eyes.

I had completely withdrawn from my friends and didn't want to see anyone. I didn't want them to sense how upset I was because they would figure out things themselves. They knew too well that my entire world revolved around Madiba and seeing him like that couldn't compare with the worst heartbreak I had ever suffered. I didn't respond to texts and/or calls from friends and just withheld myself from society completely. I was lonely too, as I couldn't share my stress and pain with anyone. I reported to Prof. Gerwel every day and kept him informed but apart from that I couldn't speak to anyone. No one told me but I knew what was best for me and the situation, and that was to withdraw completely.

Usually I find it very easy to sleep on planes or in anything that moves. I had mastered the art of a power nap. However on the flight back to Johannesburg I couldn't close an eye. I was wide awake and aware of everything that happened around me, even though I was exhausted. Upon landing in Johannesburg I didn't switch my phone on at first. I jumped on the Gautrain to make my way to Sandton where my brother would fetch me and take me home. I was anxious to not speak to anyone on the phone in public as I expected to hear the worst.

The first call I received once I arrived in Sandton was from our CEO Achmat. He asked whether I knew where Madiba was and I said that I hoped he was home already as they had left Cape Town before me. He then said they had received calls that Madiba had been taken to Millpark Hospital, a private hospital on the outskirts of Johannesburg. I called the security and they told me that they were arriving at Millpark. I called Achmat back and confirmed what the security had told me. By the time we spoke, a statement had already been issued by the foundation in consultation with the family stating that Madiba had been taken to Millpark for routine tests. I reported this to Prof. Gerwel and raised my concern over the statement being issued. I worried about referring to routine tests.

I went home and was glad to see my dogs and to be with my brother and my long-serving colleague and rock Maretha. I left a little later to go to the hospital. When I arrived doctors were busy with Madiba and I could only see him through a sliding door. I waved at him and he waved back and somehow I knew that he was OK, even though he still looked very weak. He had pneumonia, or respiratory infection as they described it, in addition to the bedsores and

inflammation in his knee. All these combined were toxic to his body.

Another two days passed with on and off visits at the hospital. By the second day we discovered a secret route in and out of the hospital so that the media couldn't use me as a 'barometer', as the family put it, for Madiba's well-being. The media started watching my every move, and I appeared in the newspaper with Josina laughing over something stupid between us and it was interpreted that 'Madiba was fine' because we laughed. By Friday afternoon he was going to be discharged and he was already showing improvement. In the meantime I was supporting the housekeeping staff to get the house ready for Madiba to return. A huge press conference followed at the hospital, during which time Madiba was taken home. The security cleverly created this decoy and by the time the media thought Madiba was about to leave, he was safely at home already.

On the Saturday after his discharge a story was being prepared for the Sunday papers that there was tension between the Foundation and family and that government had to intervene, and that was, according to speculation, the reason why no one issued a statement following Madiba's hospitalization after the first statement by the Foundation. That was not the case. There had always been tension between Madiba's staff and certain factions of the family but it was not worsened by the situation. Nor would it be correct to say 'the family', implying the entire family.

As Madiba became weaker over the years, certain family members saw the opportunity to tell his Foundation and staff what they thought we had to do and how we had to do it. If Madiba was strong enough he wouldn't allow it. He guided his staff and guarded us against many things over the years and his weakness presented an opportunity for some family members to step in and start controlling matters to their advantage.

Soon Madiba was much better, but it was taking time for him to recover completely. During his prolonged illness we were running into problems paying accounts and keeping the households running. As no one held signatory over any of Madiba's accounts, an alternative arrangement had to be made. A family feud ensued while trying to make arrangements.

* * *

The fight over who controlled Madiba's money continued and got

messier as time progressed.

Over the years the bank had always called me to verify transactions on Madiba's account. Because he was a high-profile person and they couldn't speak to him directly, they called me whenever there was a deposit, withdrawal or transfer being made to merely verify the movement in his account and that it was really him requesting the activity. The bank required, with the new power of attorney which now placed Mrs Machel and two of the Mandela daughters in control, a letter to be signed from Madiba that they could still call me to verify such transactions. I prepared all the documents and delivered them to Mrs Machel before I left for New York, where I was scheduled to travel to speak to the Clinton Foundation about another fundraiser for the Nelson Mandela Foundation, and to Tribeca about a joint venture on Mandela Day. I had never been a signatory on any of Madiba's accounts but was merely responsible for the administration, Mrs Machel didn't want to take control. I hated these calls from the bank to verify any movement in his account as it was just an irritation. The Foundation appointed a bookkeeper years ago to isolate me from having any powers over any of his moneys. I preferred it that way. Perhaps we subconsciously knew what awaited us all.

While I was in New York Makaziwe came to the office early on the Monday morning looking for me. She couldn't find me and asked Achmat where I was. He told her that I was in New York and she asked who had given me permission to travel. Achmat as CEO said he had and that I was there on official business for the Foundation. She then asked why it was necessary for a secretary to travel to New York and I don't know what he responded. She questioned why a secretary had to verify transactions when they, the Mandelas, signed documents on Madiba's account. I have learned to know that sometimes it's better to not raise your opinion about something, as the situation speaks for itself.

By now Mrs Machel had lost all her privacy in her own house. One appreciated that Madiba needed round-the-clock medical care but her privacy was just never a consideration. Imagine living in your own house where you couldn't walk from your bedroom to your kitchen with a dressing gown on. Where you can never leave your room without being properly dressed as there are always strangers in your house. Never letting your guard down, and eyes and ears to every move you make.

Another of the great lessons that I learned from both Madiba and

Prof. Gerwel is that you sometimes have to allow things to happen and simply be a spectator. Bitterness will make you sick. During his imprisonment they were forced to work in the lime- stone quarry. Chipping away for no reason. Bitterness is the same. You reduce your own character with such a mindless exercise of cultivating bitterness. You have to allow for things to play out the way they are intended to. Not every situation can be changed by us. I often during my career wanted to respond to things immediately, but over time and with age I have learned that you must just allow things to take their course. Watching Madiba over the years hiding his disbelief in people, he in a way sometimes, in my opinion, allowed them to create their own fortune or misfortune. Patience is everything.

DEEL VIER

Wat is volgende?

2009–2013

11

Ek bly tot die einde

Dit was weer Januarie en die huis in Houghton moes toegemaak word om personeellede die kans te gee om met vakansie te gaan. Ons het geen idee gehad waarheen ons Madiba kon vat nie. Dit was moeilik om hom na 'n hotel te neem en ons moes óf 'n kamer gesoek het wat groot genoeg is sodat hy heeldag binne kon bly óf 'n private plek waar hy buitetoe kon gaan sonder om in die openbaar te verskyn. Wat 'n uitdaging! En daar het die idee ontstaan om hom Sun City toe te neem. Dis net 'n vlug van vyf-en-dertig minute van Johannesburg af en hy wou nie graag te ver reis nie.

Ek het eers 'n oproep van een van sy dogters ontvang wat gekla het: 'Hoe kan jy Madiba soontoe vat?' asof dit my besluit was. Ek het haar na mevrou Machel verwys. Eers toe die dogter verstaan het dat die presidensiële suite gratis aan hom aangebied is en dat die driekamersuite groot genoeg was om te verseker dat hy nie geïsoleerd sou voel nie, asook dat hy buite kon sit sonder aandag van die publiek, het sy dit aanvaar.

By Sun City het ek en mevrou Machel een oggend besluit om vir oefening te gaan stap. My selfoon het seweuur gelui en ek het gedink sy gaan ons oefensessie uitstel. Ek het gedink dis vreemd dat sy nie na my hotelkamer toe bel nie, maar ek het my selfoon geantwoord en geglimlag terwyl ek gereed maak om te hoor sy wil laat slaap. Pleks daarvan het sy net gesê: 'Zelda, kom gou, bring die dokter.'

Ek het so vinnig soos ek kon in die gang af gehardloop en aan die dokter se deur geklop en vir hom geskree: 'Harold, kom gou!' Hy was klaar aangetrek en sonder dat ek enigiets verduidelik het, het hy sy sak gegryp en ons het na die suite toe gehardloop en op pad ook een van ons lyfwagte in die verbygaan nader getrek. Madiba het gegly en op die badkamervloer geval en sy kop teen iets gestamp. Dit was nie

ernstig nie, maar 'n kopwond bloei buitengewoon baie. Ons het gehelp en die dokter het dadelik die nodige toetse gedoen en die wond skoongemaak en aan dokter Plit, Madiba se dokter in Johannesburg, verslag gedoen.

Toe Madiba uiteindelik op die bed was terwyl die dokter hom behandel, het hy my by die deur in en uit sien beweeg en sy gesig het opgevrolik. 'O, Zeldina, jy's hier.' As ek ooit daaraan gedink het om weg te gaan, was dit die dag waarop ek besluit het dat ek tot die einde sou bly.

Daar het onbewustelik 'n skok deur my lyf getrek. Ek het nog nooit in my lewe so groot geskrik nie en ek het 'n spasma in my skouer en nek ontwikkel. Dit het drie weke se behandeling van elke moontlike aard gekos om daarvan ontslae te raak. Masserings, akupunktuur, medisyne, niks het gehelp nie. Mevrou Machel was ook in die moeilikheid. Die familie was woedend en wou die skuld op haar pak omdat sy Madiba Sun City toe gevat het en omdat hy geval het. Hy kon enige plek gegly het en dit is maar hoe dit is. Oumense val, einde van die storie.

Madiba het nie meer graag elke dag gesels nie. Hy het meer teruggetrokke geraak. Wanneer hy op kantoor was, en dit het minder en minder gereeld gebeur, sou hy op sy eie in stilte sit om te dink en hy het net gepraat op dae wat hy sterk en geselserig was. Ek moes altyd seker maak iemand sit by hom, of hy net koerant lees of in stilte in sy stoel sit. Hy het van sy interaksie met al sy kollegas van die stigting gehou en wanneer nuwe werknemers aangestel is, het ek 'n punt daarvan gemaak om hulle aan hom voor te stel. Ek het ook seker gemaak almal groet hom elke keer wanneer hy die kantoor besoek sodat hy nie afgesonder begin voel nie. Met party van die personeellede het hy standaardgrappies gehad. Terwyl Maretha Slabbert swanger was met haar eerste kind, het hy 'n hele paar keer gevra: 'So, hoeveel kinders verwag jy?' omdat sy baie klein is en groot gedra het tydens haar swangerskap. Vir Vimla, mevrou Machel se assistent, sou hy sê: 'Dit lyk my jy word langer,' omdat Vimla baie kort is.

'n Paar keer het hy my onverwags betrap as hy sê: 'O, Zeldina, ons is darem al lank saam, is ons nie?' En ek sou glimlag oor sy vreemde woordkeuse. Wat hy bedoel het, was dat ons al baie lank saam *werk*.

As jy so lank vir iemand werk, het jy nie meer enige verduideliking in fyner besonderhede nodig nie, jy is vertroud met wat hulle sê en jy weet wat hulle bedoel.

Ek sou antwoord: 'Ja, Khulu, ons werk nou al vir vyftien of sestien jaar saam.'

En op my antwoord sou hy net verbaas sê: 'Genugtig.'

Ek het nooit gevra hoekom hy so verras was oor die jare wat ons saam gewerk het nie en of hy verwag het dat ek vroeër sou loop, en of hy verbaas was dat die tyd so vinnig verbyvlieg nie.

Deur die jare het ons 'n hegte vriendskap met Morgan Freeman en sy sakevennoot Lori McCreary opgebou. Ons sou hulle soms sien wanneer ons op reis was in die buiteland of wanneer hulle Suid-Afrika besoek het. In Monaco het hulle ons geldinsamelingsdinee bygewoon en vir ons gesê Clint Eastwood het ingestem om as regisseur op te tree vir die rolprent wat hulle beplan het oor die 1995 Wêreldbeker-rugbytoernooi in Suid-Afrika. Dit sou *Invictus* genoem word, na die gedig wat Madiba in die tronk voorgedra het en wat só eindig: 'I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.' Spanne mense uit Hollywood het Suid-Afrika besoek ter voorbereiding van die rolprent en ek sou hulle gereeld ontmoet sodat ek hulle na mense kon verwys wat hulle kon help met logistiek of op ander maniere sou bystaan. Hulle het ook gevra of ek hulle sou help met Morgan se interpretasie van Madiba se karakter. Ek het die draaiboek gelees en ingestem. Ek wou net so graag soos hulle hê die fliek moes 'n sukses wees, al het ek nie in 1995 'n prominente rol in Madiba se kantoor gespeel nie.

Nadat die preproduksiespan vir hulp van die presidensie by die Uniegebou gevra het, is hulle toegelaat om daar verkenning te doen. Die stigting het hulle ook ondersteun met navorsing en ek het vir hulle wettige voorbeelde van briefhoofde en toegangskaarte gegee en planne van ons kantooruitleg opgetrek. Ek het geweet hulle sou dit goed doen, maar ek het nie besef Hollywood kan iets só volmaak herskep nie. Die eerste dag wat ek op die stel ingestap het, was dit 'n replika van Madiba se eerste huis in Houghton. Ek het my tussen die produksiespan deurgewurm en agter 'n halfoop deur gestaan totdat hulle my gewys het ek moet inkom. Toe, sonder dat ek dit verwag het, het ek Madiba in die kamer langsaan gehoor. My instink het vir my

gesê: 'Wat maak hy hier?' En toe het ek besef dis Morgan wat Madiba in sy huis se sitkamer speel. Dit was vreemd om te hoor hy klink presies soos Madiba. Oor die jare het ons kommentaar gelewer dat Morgan, soos hy ouer word, al hoe meer op Madiba begin trek het.

Ek het die dag op die stel deurgebring en met klein dingetjies gehelp oor hoe die huis of Morgan se interpretasie van Madiba verbeter kon word. Morgan was die perfekte Madiba en dié van ons wat Madiba redelik goed geken het, het saamgestem dis die akkuraatste rolprentinterpretasie wat ons van hom gesien het. Al waarmee ek Morgan regtig kon help, was klein gewoontetjies wat hy vinnig opgetel het. Hy het sy bene te veel gekruis of anders het sy hande te veel gebruik om te kommunikeer.

Dit was opwindend, maar die dag was gou verby en ek moes terugkeer Johannesburg toe. Ek kon net een dag verlof insit, maar kort daarna is nog tonele oor Madiba of die lyfwagte verfilm en ek het nog verlof ingesit en by die produksiespan aangesluit om te probeer help deur te sê waar hulle iets nog meer geloofwaardig kan maak.

Tydens Madiba se negentigste verjaardagvieringe het ons mense – vriende en die publiek – gevra om boodskappe van gelukwensing te stuur wat ons in 'n boek sou opneem wat hy saam met die foto's van die feesvieringe in Hyde Park kon bewaar. Een van die gelukwensinge was 'n brief van Bono. Hy het geskryf: 'Veels geluk, Madiba, ek werk daaraan om 18 Julie 'n openbare vakansiedag in elke land te maak om erkenning te gee aan die feit dat Nelson Mandela se stryd nie oor is totdat elkeen wat na vryheid smag die kans kry om dit aan te gryp nie. Ek glo u verjaardag moet 'n wêreldwye geleentheid wees om dié te eer wat nog steeds in 'n stryd gewikkel is.' Ek en Tim Massey het na die brief gekyk en geglimlag. Dit sê soveel meer as wat 'n mens met die eerste oogopslag dink. Hoe sou ons dit bereik? Ons het 'n bietjie oor die idee nagedink en ná oorlegpleging met Fink Haysom, Madiba se regsadviseur tydens sy presidentskap en wat in dié stadium vir die Verenigde Nasies gewerk het, het die stigting en 46664 besluit om die Suid-Afrikaanse ambassadeur in die VN te vra om 'n voorstel in te dien dat 18 Julie tot Internasionale Nelson Mandela-dag verklaar moet word.

Die VN het die voorstel sonder teenstem aanvaar en die resolusie is goedgekeur. Ons ambassadeur by die VN, Baso Sangqu, het puik werk

gedoen in sy pogings om steun te werf onder sy mede-ambassadeurs. Ons was uiters trots toe ons hoor dat die resolusie aanvaar is en hoewel 18 Julie nie ’n openbare vakansiedag is nie, is dit verklaar tot ’n dag van diens vir mense om wêreldwyd ’n verskil in hul eie gemeenskappe te maak. Hoewel Bono weier om krediet te aanvaar vir die idee, herinner ek hom gereeld daaraan dat sy idees, wat soms waansinnig klink, die wêreld ’n beter plek maak en hierdie was ’n goeie voorbeeld daarvan.

Ons het nog ’n 46664-geldinsameling vir die stigting in New York gehou, maar dit was moeilik. Ons wou tydens ’n ekonomiese resessie geld insamel en dit was ons eerste poging waar Madiba nie teenwoordig sou wees nie. Tydens ’n finansiële krisis wil mense nie as spandabelrig gesien word nie, selfs al is dit ten bate van liefdadigheid, en diegene wat dit bygewoon het, was dié waarop ons altyd kon reken. Dit was nie ’n groot sukses nie en ons was reg daarvoor. Die goeie ding daarvan was dat ’n kêrel my vir die eerste keer op eie onkoste vergesel het. Vir die eerste keer in sestien jaar was daar iemand na wie ek my saans kon wend wanneer die werk verby was.

Die eensaamste deel van my werk oor die jare heen was die nagte alleen in hotelle oral in die wêreld. Daar was af en toe ’n kêrel of ’n wanfunksionele verhouding of iets kortstondigs, maar niemand het ooit my omgewing verstaan nie. Daar was ook gedurig die gedagte aan mense wat om die verkeerde redes met my vriende gemaak het, of dit nou was om ’n boek geteken te kry of om voordeel te trek uit my kontakte of om interessante mense te ontmoet. Na ’n paar teleurstellings het ek begin om my soos ’n moderne weergawe van ’n kluisenaar te gedra. Dus was ek altyd alleen. Daar was niemand om te bel nie, niemand vir wie ek kon nagsê nie, dus is ’n mens geneig om selfs meer te fokus en emosioneel afhanklik van jou werk te raak om vir daardie eensaamheid te vergoed. Ek dink daar het ’n punt gekom waar dit minder gekompliseerd was om my lewe met iemand te deel. Ek het nie verskonings nodig gehad om te werk of om so toegewyd te wees nie. Hoewel die vryheid my die geleentheid gebied het om as mens te groei, het ek iemand nodig gehad, ’n geesgenoot met wie ek dinge kon deel en vir wie ek kon omgee. Hierdie keer was dit anders.

Die plan was dat Madiba aan die einde van die jaar ’n paar dae op

Shambala sou deurbring sodat hy en mevrou Machel kon rus en sodat die personeel by die huis in Houghton verlof kon neem. Aan die einde van ons tydjie op die plaas was dit duidelik dat Madiba by die dag vinniger ouer word as wat ons gedink het en dat sy kragte besig was om af te neem.

Hy kon nie meer maklik alleen beweeg nie. Iets het hom gepla. Hy het een oggend in 'n slegte bui wakker geword, geweier om te eet en wou dadelik van die plaas af vertrek. 'Mum,' het hy gesê, 'ons het 'n krisis.' Ek en Mum het hom daaroor uitgevra, maar hy wou nie sê wat dit was nie. Dan sou hy weer begin: 'Mum, kan jy nie sien hier is 'n krisis nie?' Madiba het daarop aangedring om dadelik te vertrek. Hy het gewoonlik in 'n militêre helikopter Shambala toe gevlieg. Die rit van Johannesburg was te ver vir hom. Dit was vakansie en dit was moeilik om op so 'n kort kennisgewing vlieëniers te vind. Douw Steyn was ook op die plaas en Mum het hom gevra om te help om 'n helikopter in die hande te kry.

Intussen het lede van die veiligheidspan vir Makaziwe, Madiba se oudste dogter, in Johannesburg gebel om te sê hy dring daarop aan om dadelik te vertrek. Makaziwe het Mum gebel en opdrag gegee: 'Laat my pa vry, nou … Laat my pa vry!' Ek kon alles op die foon hoor waar ek langs mevrou Machel gestaan het. Ek het ineengekrimp. Ons het probeer vasstel wat die krisis was waarna Madiba verwys het. Ons het ook gewag dat Douw ons sou help om 'n helikopter te reël. Die volgende oomblik het die veiligheidspan se konvooi verskyn. Hulle het Madiba in die motor gelaai en met hom Johannesburg toe begin ry. Daar was paniek, want dit het nog nooit voorheen gebeur dat die veiligheidsmense mevrou Machel versaak of agtergelaat het nie. Madiba het nie presies geweet wat aangaan nie. Mevrou Machel, 'n voormalige presidentsvrou van Suid-Afrika en die vrou van Madiba, is sonder veiligheid of vervoer op Shambala agtergelaat. Ek en Josina moes tussen ons 'n manier vind om haar by die huis te kry.

Douw het intussen 'n helikopter gereël gekry en hy het die konvooi uit die lug agterna gesit. Omdat hy nie geweet het hoe die Suid-Afrikaanse Polisiediens werk nie, het hy opdrag gegee dat die helikopter op die hoofweg land. Hy het nie besef die lyfwagte sou waarskynlik na die helikopter skiet as hulle dit sou doen nie. Die

plaasbestuurder, Tinus Nel, het agter die konvooi aan gejaag sodat Douw sy planne aan hulle kon oordra. En eers toe die konvooi by ’n deurry-KFC-restaurant in ’n naburige dorp stilhou, glo om vir Madiba middagete te koop, kon hy hulle inhaal om hulle van Douw se planne in te lig. Die vlieënier is aangesê om die plan te laat vaar en Douw is gevra om Madiba eerder in Johannesburg te ontmoet.

Toe Madiba weg is by Shambala was hy woedend, maar nie een van ons het verstaan waaroor die bohaai was nie. Hy het aanhoudend gesê dat daar ’n krisis was. Min het ons geweet Madiba het ’n visioen gehad van die jare van siekte en swaarkry wat vir hom voorgelê het. Hy het geweet sy liggaam verander, maar hy kon nie vir ons sê wat hy voel nie.

In die vorige sestien jaar was ek baie keer kwaad, maar daar was altyd ’n punt waar ’n gelag en ’n sin vir ironie by die woede oorgeneem het. Sommige van ons het in daardie voorafgaande jare na Madiba omgesien, vir hom gesorg, seker gemaak hy eet die regte kos op die regte tyd, dat hy reg behandel word en dat dinge volgens sy wense gebeur. En dan verander die situasie skielik en ’n mens bevind jou aan die buitekant waar jy binnetoe kyk. Ek het nooit gedink dat enigiemand vir Madiba na ’n deurry-KFC-restaurant toe sal vat nie, maar skielik is dit wat gebeur het.

Hy het by die huis aangekom terwyl ons nog probeer het om in Shambala op te pak sodat ons mevrou Machel in Johannesburg kon kry. Kort na Madiba se aankoms het Douw in Houghton aangekom, met Makaziwe kort op sy hakke. Madiba was diep ontsteld en kon nog steeds nie uiting gee aan sy frustrasie nie. Maar hy het almal buiten Douw uit die huis gejaag. ‘Gaan uit,’ het hy gesê, ‘gaan uit!’ En almal is weg en hy het gesê hy wil nie hê enigiemand moet by sy sake inmeng nie.

Op tye soos dié, wanneer Madiba kwaad geword het, was ek werklik besorg oor sy gesondheid. Hy het so kwaad geword dat ek soms gedink het hy is baie na aan ’n beroerte, maar ’n dag of twee het verbygegaan en Madiba het weer kalmeer. Hulle is kort daarna weg na Qunu, waar hulle beplan het om Kersfees deur te bring.

Vroeg in 2010 het die vervaardigers van die *Top Gear*-televisieprogram in Suid-Afrika ons genader en gevra of die stigting dit sou oorweeg om met hulle saam te werk in ruil daarvoor dat hulle die stigting ’n

begunstigde van hul geldinsameling maak. Soos alle versoeke is dié een na ons komitee verwys wat bestaan het uit die uitvoerende hoof, die voorsitter en senior personeellede, en laastens het ons Madiba gevra of hy belang sou stel om hulle te ontmoet. Nadat ons aan hom verduidelik het wie hulle was, het hy ingestem. Anders as wat die media berig het, het die organiseerders gevra of Jeremy Clarkson en sy span 'n hoflikheidsbesoek aan Madiba kon bring. Nadat ons gesien het *Top Gear* is die televisieprogram met die grootste kykertal ter wêreld, het ons ingestem op voorwaarde dat die stigting op die een of ander manier deel daarvan sou uitmaak, aangesien dit 'n platform kon skep om die Sentrum vir Nagedagtenis (Centre of Memory) bekend te stel en om Madiba se nalatenskap in die toekoms in die wêreld te verseker. Al die betrokke partye het ingestem. Met die aand van die geldinsameling is 'n miljoen rand ingesamel en ons was baie tevrede. Ondanks beloftes dat Clarkson en James May die geleentheid sou bywoon, was hulle nêrens te sien nie. Ek het gehoop ek kon hulle ontmoet om 'n aanvoeling te kry vir wie hulle was, aangesien hulle die volgende dag 'n hoflikheidsbesoek aan Madiba sou aflê. Ek was 'n geesdriftige kyker van *Top Gear*.

Op die dag van die geldinsameling het Neil Armstrong, die eerste man op die maan in 1969, Madiba besoek. In 1969 was Madiba in die tronk, maar hy het onthou toe die tronkbewaarders hom daarvan vertel het, aangesien hy geen toegang tot koerante of radio gehad het nie en natuurlik geen televisie nie. In daardie stadium was Madiba teen baie ander ontmoetings gekant, maar die gedagte dat hy met meneer Armstrong kon gesels, het hom geprikkel. Meneer Armstrong het die grootste deel van sy lewe as kluisenaar deurgebring en ons het nie veel van hom geweet nie. Ek was nuuskierig om uit te vind hoe hy geleef het ná so 'n uitsonderlike ervaring en hy het met graagte sy herinneringe met ons gedeel. Ek was geboei en vol ontsag vir meneer Armstrong en het hom die vreemdste vrae gevra nadat Madiba se vrae opgedroog het. Madiba se belangstelling was groot. Neil Armstrong was 'n liewe siel en 'n mens kon aanvoel in sy karakter dat hy 'n ander soort begrip van die lewe gehad het as gevolg van sy ervaring. Hy was ook bejaard en dit was maklik vir Madiba om met hom gedagtes te wissel. Hierdie was een van my toptien-oomblikke saam met Madiba; die twee van hulle saam as bejaarde mans wat hul uitsonderlike

ervarings uitruil.

Ek het geweet Jeremy Clarkson het ’n goeie humorsin, maar ek het gedink hy sou ook taktvol wees. Toe hy by Madiba se kantoor instap, het hy Madiba gevra of ’n ontkleedanseres al ooit op sy skoot gesit het. Ek het gedink dis heeltemal onvanpas om so iets aan ’n bejaarde staatsman te vra en Madiba het na my gekyk asof hy van my verwag het om te antwoord. Ek het na Madiba gedraai en vir hom gesê: ‘Khulu, u hoef nie te antwoord nie.’ Ek het na Jeremy gekyk en ek was op my hoede. Hy kon sien ek het gedink dis ’n belaglike ding om aan ’n een-en-negentigjarige man te vra.

Hulle het gaan sit en ek het Madiba herinner wie hulle was. Ek het verduidelik dat hulle op die gewildste televisieprogram in die wêreld is en hulle kykertal genoem en ’n bietjie daaroor uitgebrei. Hy het geluister en ag geslaan en daaroor nagedink. Hulle het hul boeke aan hom oorhandig en hy het daardeur geblaai. Hy was nie baie lus vir gesels nie en het ’n bietjie teruggetrokke gelyk.

Die eerste probleem waarvan ek nie bewus was nie, was dat Clarkson gedink het Madiba het gesê hy wil hulle sien en Madiba het gedink hulle het gevra om hóm te sien. Jeremy het toe vir Madiba gevra of hy gereeld kantoor toe kom en Madiba het gesê nee, dit was sy eerste dag op kantoor daardie jaar. Maar ek het geweet die koerante het berig dat hy die vorige dag vir Eddie Izzard en Armstrong ontmoet het. Ek het hom soos gewoonlik reggehelp en gesê: ‘Nee, Khulu, onthou, u was gister hier, u het vir Neil Armstrong ontmoet. Hy was so interessant toe hy vertel het van sy reis na die maan.’

Madiba het geantwoord en gesê: ‘O ja, dis waar, nou onthou ek.’ Hy het na Clarkson en my gekyk en niks verder gehad om te sê nie. Toe sê hy in ’n grap: ‘Was julle al op die maan?’ As Jeremy grappe kon maak, kon Madiba seker ook.

Later het Clarkson ’n artikel geskryf waarin hy heel onvanpas gesê het Madiba het gedink hy is Neil Armstrong, wat beslis nie die geval was nie. Hy mag dalk nie geweet het wie Clarkson was nie, maar hy het hom beslis nie met iemand anders verwar nie. Hulle het Madiba se intelligensie onderskat omdat hy oud was. Na my mening het hulle geen respek getoon nie.

Verder het die organiseerders ons ook ’n paar dae later ontmoet en

gesê die miljoen rand wat ons gedink het ingesamel is en wat volgens berigte vir die Nelson Mandela-stigting bestem was, was nie alles ons s'n nie. Hulle moes nog die kostes van die ete en die geleentheid aftrek, wat beteken het ons sou net die helfte van die geld kry. Ek was woedend. Ek het gesê indien dit die voorwaardes was waarvolgens die geld ingesamel is, ons nie die geld sal aanvaar nie. En ingevolge bestuursbeleid het dit vir ons probleme geskep. Die storie sou later in die *Mail & Guardian* in Suid-Afrika verskyn en vir die organiseerders het ek soos 'n uiterste feeks gelyk. Maar ek het nie in die minste omgegee nie. Ek was eenvoudig siek en sat vir mense wat voordeel uit Madiba en ons wou trek en in raaisels praat pleks daarvan om iets reguit te sê. Die stigting het uiteindelik die geld aanvaar, maar ons moes afsonderlik met elke koper opvolg. Dit was moeite en nie wat ons gedink het die ooreenkoms was nie. Dit was 'n bitter pil om te sluk, en ek het gevoel die stigting is nie met die nodige respek behandel nie. Mense het later gevra hoe ons Clarkson kon toelaat om Madiba te ontmoet. Maar ons het die normale prosedure gevolg en die saak met al Madiba se raadgewers bespreek, soos in baie ander gevalle. Dit wat op papier belowe is, meer spesifiek die geleentheid om die werk van die stigting aan 'n internasionale gehoor bekend te stel, het voordelig gelyk. Dit was nie net oor die geld nie, maar oor die belofte van dekking wat ons broodnodig gehad het in ons poging om Nelson Mandela se nalatenskap te bewaar. En so leer 'n mens …

In 2010 was Suid-Afrika die gasheer van Fifa se Wêreldbeker-sokkertoernooi. Madiba het net nou en dan 'n draai by die kantoor gemaak. Hy het tekens van sy ouderdom begin toon. Ons was nie verbaas nie, maar die publiek was wel. Hy was meer vergeetagtig en soms was hy nie lus om mense te sien of om op te staan nie. Ander dae wou hy weer nie geïsoleerd voel nie en dan het hy gevra om mense te sien. Hy wou die meeste van die tyd by die huis deurbring en rus. Ons is gou oorweldig deur kunstenaars, besoekers, toeriste en elke staatshoof wat vir die Wêreldbekertoernooi in Suid-Afrika was en almal wou 'n hoflikheidsbesoek aan Madiba bring. Dit was onmoontlik vir hom om al hierdie afsprake toe te staan en ons het besluit om sy dagboek toe te maak uit vrees dat hy teen die tyd van die openingseremonie te moeg sou wees om dit by te woon, soos hy graag wou.

En dan was daar Fifa. Ons het grappe gemaak en gesê dit voel asof hierdie wêreldliggaam ons land binnegeval het. Ek het besluit Fifa was nie ’n wêreldwye sokkerorganisasie nie, maar ’n land op sy eie. Maar hulle was baie tegemoetkomend wat Madiba se bywoning van die openingseremonie betref. Oor die algemeen het Suid-Afrikaners gevoel die Wêreldbekertoernooi kos die land te veel geld omdat ons baie in infrastruktuur moes belê om die groot aantal besoekers te hanteer. Die meeste mense in Suid-Afrika het steeds in armoede gelewe, hoewel die ANC sestien jaar tevore die mag oorgeneem het. Die lewering van basiese dienste was stadig as gevolg van die gereelde en uiteenlopende uitdagings waardeur ontwikkelende lande in die gesig gestaar word en hoewel Fifa belowe het om ons terug te betaal vir die projekte van sosiale verantwoordelikheid, was daar min tekens daarvan, toe of nou.

Ek het gedink ek het oor die algemeen ’n goeie verhouding met Fifa se beamptes gehad ondanks wrywing wat ontstaan het as hulle ’n te groot las op Madiba geplaas het. Ek het baie vergaderings bygewoon ter voorbereiding van die openingseremonie waar al die betrokke partye teenwoordig was. Later sou ek aan die uitvoerende komitee uiteensit wat Madiba nodig sou hê en hulle het hul planne verander en aangepas om hom tegemoet te kom. Natuurlik wou hulle hom bitter graag by die opening hê sodat dit duidelik sou wees dat die toernooi sy goedkeuring wegdra, maar ek wou ook graag glo dat hulle werklikwaar genoeg omgegee het om na sy behoeftes om te sien. Ek was baie oop teenoor Danny Jordaan, die uitvoerende hoof van die reëlingskomitee in Suid-Afrika, en teenoor Fifa se mense om die moontlike misbruik van Madiba te vermy en oor hoe moeilik dit vir hom was om ’n geleentheid soos dié in die middel van die winter by te woon.

Alle presidente en adjunkpresidente in Suid-Afrika het ’n mediese span wat saam met hulle beweeg. Hierdie voorreg is ook aan Madiba gebied wanneer hy oorsee gereis het, selfs na sy aftrede. Soos hy ouer geword het, het die span meer op die voorgrond getree. En teen die tyd wat hy twee-en-negentig was, het hulle hom na alle plaaslike geleenthede vergesel. Na een inligtingsvergadering ter voorbereiding van die openingseremonie het Jérôme Valcke, Fifa se uitvoerende hoof, my eenkant toe geroep en vir my gesê hy het ’n oproep van

Suid-Afrika se geneesheer-generaal ontvang. Dit was egter nie die hoof self wat gebel het nie, maar generaal Zola Dabula, sy adjunk en die persoon wat die mediese sorg aan alle voormalige presidente hanteer het. Tot in daardie stadium het ons generaal Dabula net gesien wanneer daar belangrike besoekers vir Madiba was.

Jérôme het vir my gesê hy het bevel van generaal Dabula ontvang dat hy, Dabula, die enigste een was wat besluite sou neem oor Madiba se bewegings. Hy het besluit sodra Madiba by Safa House sou aankom (die kantoorgebou naby die stadion waar die Suid-Afrikaanse Sokkerfederasie gesetel is), sou hy na 'n wagkamer in die voorsitter, Irvin Khoza, se kantoor geneem word en wanneer dit tyd word vir hom om op die veld te gaan, sou hy omtrent 'n kilometer ver in 'n gholfkarretjie na die ingang van die stadion vervoer word.

Vir my het dit prakties eenvoudig geen sin gemaak nie. Hoekom sou jy 'n bejaarde mens in die middel van die winter so ver in 'n gholfkarretjie vervoer? As jy Madiba geken het, sou jy geweet het hy verpes 'n wagkamer. Dit was twee dae voor die eerste wedstryd toe Jérôme hierdie voorskrifte ontvang het. Ek kon sien hy was verward. Ek het jare voor die toernooi al saam met hulle gewerk en nou kry hy 'n oproep van iemand met wie hy nog nooit voorheen gepraat het nie, twee dae voor die begin van die toernooi. Gelukkig was die hoof van die presidensiële beskermingseenheid, brigadier Dladla, ook by die vergadering wat pas verdaag het toe Jérôme hierdie opdragte met my deel. Ek het brigadier Dladla geroep en Jérôme gevra om die storie te herhaal, wat hy toe gedoen het. Brigadier Dladla wou niks hiervan weet nie. Die veiligheidspan het altyd die besluite geneem oor vervoer en Madiba se bewegings, in ooreenstemming met die program wat ons uitgewerk het.

Ek was verstom oor hierdie inmenging en die vreemde logika van hul denke. Gelukkig is die saak opgelos toe brigadier Dladla generaal Dabula gebel het. Dit was egter duidelik dat 'n gesagstryd gevoer is. Die mediese personeel onder generaal Dabula het gevoel dat hulle die hoofgesaghebbers is, terwyl die veiligheidspersoneel onder brigadier Dladla geglo het hulle is werklik in beheer. Madiba se kantoor het 'n lang werksverhouding met die veiligheidsmense gehad en ook wedersydse respek vir en begrip van ons onderskeie kundighede. Dit het gevoel asof daar 'n poging was om die gesag van die Nelson

Mandela-stigting en Madiba se kantoor te ondermyn. Hoe ouer hy geword het en hoe minder hy in staat was om sy eie wense uit te spreek, hoe meer het mense inbeweeg en aan hom probeer voorsê wat om te doen, vir hul eie belang eerder as vir syne, hoewel hulle dalk gedink het hulle tree in landsbelang op. Ek het in die middel beland en dit was nie vir my maklik nie.

In ’n hartseer verwikkeling is Madiba se geliefde agterkleindogter Zenani op die aand van die openingskonsert van die Wêreldbekersokkertoernooi, ’n dag voor die amptelike opening, tragies in ’n motorongeluk dood. Ek het die volgende oggend wakker geword en ’n boodskap ontvang van die presidensie wat vra of die gerugte waar was. Ek het navraag gedoen en dit was inderdaad die geval. Ek was stom van skok. Zenani was die oulikste, liefdevolste kind wat jy jou kon indink.

Toe ek van Zenani junior se dood hoor, het ek dadelik aanvaar dat Madiba nie in staat sou wees om die openingseremonie by te woon nie. Maar ek het verwarrende boodskappe ontvang. Mevrou Machel was nie tuis nie. Sy het die familie gaan ondersteun en ek kon haar nie dadelik in die hande kry nie, maar het boodskappe gelos. Toe sy terugbel, het sy gesê die familie het bymekaargekom en besluit Madiba moenie gaan nie. Net ’n halfuur later het ek ’n oproep van die huis ontvang met die boodskap dat Madiba beslis sou gaan. Toe ek vra hoe dit gebeur het, is ek meegedeel dat personeel wat by die huis teenwoordig was Madiba oorreed het om net ’n paar minute by die opening in te loer. Ek het weer gebel om vas te stel wie by die huis was en dit het geklink asof die mediese personeel en van die veiligheidspersoneel Madiba oortuig het dat die wêreld wag om hom te sien. Dit was inderdaad so en hulle het op sy gevoelens gespeel, maar eintlik wou hulle ’n manier vind om self na die opening toe te gaan en deur Madiba om te praat, kon hulle dit doen, ten koste van hom en die familie in so ’n moeilike tyd. Ek het vuur gespoeg. Ek het hieroor verslag gedoen aan mevrou Machel en sy het by die huis aangekom om die saak op te los. Tot minute voor die openingseremonie het mense probeer om Madiba om te praat om te gaan.

Dit het duidelik geword dat die gesagstryd oor wat Madiba moet doen en nie moet doen nie allermins maklik sou wees. Madiba het nie

gegaan nie, maar eerder gedoen wat reg is en ’n nagwaak saam met die familie gehou. Die gesagstryd was vermoeiend. Die mediese personeel het duidelik die begeerte gehad om hul gesag op Madiba se lewe af te dwing. Diegene wat hom jare lank gedien het, is stelselmatig eenkant toe geskuif. Min het ek geweet wat vorentoe sou wag. Destyds was ek jammer vir Madiba. Ek het my verbeel hy voel soos ’n bokkie wat deur ’n voertuig getref is, verward en met mense wat hom dié kant en dáárdie kant toe wil dwing terwyl hy nie meer helder daaroor kon nadink nie.

Ondanks hierdie hartseer dag vir ons was die opgewondheid in die land groot toe die eerste wedstryd by Soccer City afskop. Suid-Afrika was weer ’n verenigde nasie. Sport het ons na mekaar toe gebring en ná die suksesvolle openingswedstryd het mense se vrees dat die toernooi sou misluk, verdamp. Daar was oral toeriste en daar is flink sake gedoen. Vlae van elke land het orals gehang en mense het hul motors en huise versier met die vlag van die land wat hulle ondersteun het.

Zenani se begrafnis was die week na die openingswedstryd. Twee weke later, terwyl ek ’n wedstryd saam met die Clintons bygewoon het, is my ouma ook oorlede. Ek het twee hartseer begrafnisse tydens die Wêreldbekertoernooi bygewoon en dit het my met gemengde gevoelens gelaat. Dit was moeilik om meegevoer te word deur die nasionale feestelikhede. Mevrou Machel en Josina het my ouma se begrafnis in Pretoria bygewoon. Dit het my familie ontroer en hulle was dankbaar. Ek het nooit gedink dat sy die tyd en moeite sou doen om so ver te ry om my of my familie te ondersteun nie. My ouma was die laaste van my grootouers en ondanks die feit dat ek ’n bietjie bitter was omdat sy my ma deur die trauma van ’n kinderhuis gesit het, was ek baie, baie hartseer oor haar dood. My wonderlike ma het geen wrokke gekoester nie en was baie na aan my ouma. Sy was tot op die laaste by haar.

Mevrou Machel is daar vir ’n mens wanneer jy dit nie verwag nie en het ’n moedersinstink wat haar in staat stel om te weet wanneer jy haar onderskraging nodig het. Dit het my laat dink aan die ondersteuning wat sý nodig het. Madiba het ouer geword en dit was moeilik vir haar om die proses te aanskou. Sy is nie ’n masjien nie en het ook ondersteuning nodig. Sy was al daar vir my wanneer my hart

stukkend was oor kêrels wat my verlaat het of wanneer die lewe eenvoudig te veel vir my geword het. Meer as enigiemand anders.

Madiba se hele wese was op respek gegrond: respek vir jou vriende, respek vir die vyand, vir hulle wat armer is as jy, vir hulle wat eenvoudiger aantrek en minder geleerd is as jy. Selfs hulle wat jou seergemaak het of wat foute gemaak het. Maar ook vir hulle met meer mag, meer geld en wat slimmer is as jy. Daar was nie 'n enkele dag wat ek gevoel het Madiba tree oneerbiedig teenoor my op omdat ek sy mindere was nie, of omdat ek minder kennis gehad, minder verdien, so min oor die lewe geweet het en soms, ja, so dom was. Nie een dag nie. Nie by een geleentheid nie. Mevrou Machel was die een mens wat Madiba werklik gelukkig gemaak het. En net daarvoor verdien sy respek, as daar enige twyfel is of sy dit verwerf of daarop aangedring het. Sy verdien dit.

In Mei het ek besluit dat ek iets spesiaals vir Mandela-dag moes doen. Nadat ek saam met 'n kollega, Sello Hatang, hieroor nagedink het, het ek besluit ek wil 'n rit saam met 'n groep motorfietsryers onderneem. Die gedagte was dat dit 'n verteenwoordigende groep sou wees wat die tog tussen Johannesburg en Kaapstad van ongeveer eenduisendvierhonderd kilometer sou aanpak om Mandela-dag te bevorder. Op pad sou ons stilhou by liefdadigheidsprojekte waar ons sewe-en-sestig minute sou aanbied om liefdadigheid te ondersteun. Mandela-dag is 'n gedagte waarby ons almal kan inval as 'n eerbewys aan Madiba. Dis 'n dag van diens en Madiba, wat sewe-en-sestig jaar daaraan gewy het om sosiale onregte teen te staan, het net sewe-en-sestig minute van jou tyd gevra. Die gedagte was ook om vir mense te wys dat ons die wêreld kan verbeter deur net dít te doen.

Te midde van die druk van die Wêreldbekertoernooi het ek ook na sakemense omgesien wat Suid-Afrika vir die toernooi besoek het en die motorfietsrit gereël. Ek het die vorige jaar 'n besigheid begin wat spesifiek aan BBP's se logistieke behoeftes kon voldoen waar hulle ook al deur Suid-Afrika reis. My rol by die kantoor het al hoe kleiner geword en ek moes besig bly, wat my laat besluit het om die onderneming te begin. Tydens die Wêreldbekertoernooi het ek 'n hele paar sulke hoëprofielkliënte bedien en my tyd en energie was wyd versprei tussen al hierdie verantwoordelikhede.

Die dag nadat die toernooi ten einde geloop het, het ons

motorfietsrit van die stigting af vertrek, tydens die koudste deel van die winter. Dit was pret en ’n groot sukses, en aangesien Morgan Freeman en Lori McCreary in Suid-Afrika was vir die Wêreldbekertoernooi, het hulle saam met ons gekom. Ons het dekking vir Mandela-dag oor die hele land en op internasionale netwerke gekry. Die heel belangrikste: dit het duisende lewens geraak. Dis iets wat ek graag in die toekoms sal wil voortsit. Die hele groep het aan die einde van die rit goed gevoel, omdat ons regtig ’n verskil in mense se lewe help maak het.

Op die Dinsdag voor die eindstryd van die toernooi het Madiba ons laat weet hy wil beslis die laaste wedstryd bywoon of ten minste ’n verskyning maak, aangesien hy die openingswedstryd misgeloop het as gevolg van Zenani junior se dood. Ek het alle partye ingelig van sy wense en ons moes weer die masjinerie in werking stel wat sy verskyning moontlik sou maak.

Op die Sondag van die eindstryd het ons uiteindelik al die reëlings gereed gehad sodat Madiba tydens die afsluitingseremonie ten minste vir die toeskouers sou kon waai. Hy was opgewonde, maar dit was winter en ons het geweet ons moes sy verskyning so kort as moontlik hou. Met ons aankoms by die stadion het generaal Dabula en die hele topstruktuur van die weermag op Madiba gewag. Ek kon nie sien hoekom nie, aangesien hulle duidelik net lynbestuurders was wat nie enige situasie wat kon opduik self sou hanteer nie. Die veiligheidspan het een gholfkarretjie vir Madiba voorberei en die mediese span ’n ander. Die magstryd het begin. Generaal Dabula het daarop aangedring dat hy saam met Madiba op die gholfkarretjie moes ry vir die afstand van vyftig meter tot op die veld. Die veiligheidsmense het nie saamgestem nie, maar stilgebly. Daardie reëling het ook beteken dat daar nie vir mevrou Machel plek op die gholfkarretjie sou wees nie. Ek wou niks daarvan hoor nie en ’n groot stryery het ontstaan. Al die personeellede was jonk en fiks genoeg om langs die gholfkarretjie te stap indien so iets nodig sou wees. Indien enigiets in die openbaar met ’n BBP sou gebeur, sou ’n mens in elk geval nie daar en dan na die saak omsien nie, maar hom of haar eers na ’n veilige plek neem. Hoekom moes mevrou Machel se sitplek aan ’n mediese personeellid afgestaan word? Hulle sou my moes skiet as hulle van my verwag het om in te gee. Daar was geen gesonde verstand by hul besluit betrokke

nie. Teen die tyd dat Madiba daar aangekom het, was die probleem nog nie opgelos nie.

Die veiligheidsmense en ek het vasgeskop en ek kon generaal Dabula se wrewel aanvoel. Hy wou die laaste sê hê, maar ons was nie bereid om Madiba se lewe moeilik te maak deur aan hom toe te gee nie. Toe Madiba se naam genoem word, het die gholfkarretjie op die veld gery. Natuurlik was die karretjie deur veiligheidsmense en 'n horde mediese personeel omring, selfs die grootkoppe van die weermag se mediese korps. Ek het in die tonnel bly staan en die sirkus van 'n afstand bekyk. Die skare se geraas was oorverdowend toe hulle Madiba sien. Hy het geglimlag en gewaai. Hy het sy Russiese pelshoed opgehad en sy gunsteling- warm jas, serp en handskoene aangehad. Mum het langs hom gesit en hulle het vir die skare gewuif. Madiba was gelukkig en dit was 'n gepaste einde aan sy openbare loopbaan. Dit was inderdaad die laaste keer ooit dat hy formeel by 'n openbare geleentheid opgetree het.

Teen die einde van 2010 het Madiba na Shambala teruggekeer sodat sy huishoudelike personeel verlof kon neem. Aangesien hy nie meer gereis het nie en selde iewers heen gegaan het, was die personeel by sy huis voltyds aan diens. Hulle was uitgeput en het 'n behoorlike verposing nodig gehad.

Toe ek laat in Desember 2010 in Kaapstad aankom waar ek Nuwejaar saam met Madiba en Mum sou deurbring, was ek uiters besorg toe ek hom sien. Hy het die voorafgaande weke gewig verloor en was uiters ongemaklik en prikkelbaar. Toe ek met vakansie gegaan het, het hy al reeds baie moeilik geloop. Ek het soos altyd my kommer oor my baas teenoor die mediese personeel uitgespreek en hulle het net vir my gesê alles is in die haak. Dit was duidelik dat my baas se welstand niks meer met my uit te waai gehad het nie.

Mevrou Machel was ook bekommerd, maar dit het duidelik geword dat die mediese personeel nou deur van Madiba se familielede aangesê is wat om te doen en hul prioriteite het van mevrou Machel s'n verskil wat Madiba se welstand aanbetref. Die Kaapse medici wat onafhanklik opgetree het, was bekommerd en gespanne.

Rodney, 'n paramedikus in Kaapstad, en ek het besluit om mediese toerusting aan te koop wat Madiba gemakliker sou maak. Die verpleegsters en mediese personeel wat saam met hom van Pretoria

gereis het, het nie gelyk asof hulle in sy toestand en ongemak belangstel nie. Die sekretaresse, wat gereeld deur die familie as ondoeltreffend beskryf is, het nou kragte met die medici in Kaapstad saamgesnoer om alle moontlikhede vir Madiba se gesondheidsorg te ondersoek. Die feit dat ek vandag nie in ’n gestig is nie, bly vir my ’n wonderwerk. Situasies soos dié het my laat voel ek raak van my kop af.

My eerste vraag was, as die regering nou na hom omgesien het, hoekom het hulle nie die basiese noodsaaklikhede verskaf nie? Die dinge wat ’n mens nodig het verander mos soos jy ouer word en jou gesonde verstand sê tog vir jou dat jy aanhoudend daarby moet aanpas en hom so gemaklik moontlik moet maak. Ek het eenkeer in Madiba se *Conversations with Myself* gelees wat hy in ’n gesprek aan die redakteur Richard Stengel gesê het: ‘Ek het in kringe beweeg waar gesonde verstand en praktiese ervaring belangrik was en waar hoë akademiese kwalifikasies nie noodwendig die deurslag gegee het nie.’ En ja, ek het presies dieselfde dinge agtergekom. Daar is sekere gevalle waar gesonde verstand wat my pa my geleer het belangriker was as my gebrek aan grade en akademiese kwalifikasies.

Soos die dae voortgegaan het, het dinge vinnig agteruitgegaan. Verslag is oor die situasie gelewer aan diegene in Pretoria wat in beheer was van Madiba se versorging – generaal Dabula en geneesheer-generaal Vejaynand Ramlakan. Dit was duidelik dat ’n spesialis sy knie moes ondersoek.

In die tussentyd het ons besef Madiba sou nie op 11 Januarie kon teruggaan na die huis in Johannesburg soos ons beplan het nie. Hy het met groot moeite geloop en ons het ’n rolstoel gekoop vir sy gemak. Die stoel sou egter nie in die hysbak by die huis pas nie en ons sou na ’n groter hysbak moes opgradeer. Dit het beteken die maatskappy wat die hysbak geïnstalleer het, moes die skag vergroot vir die nuwe model. Meme Kgagare, Madiba se huisbestuurder, en ek het die maatskappy wat die hysbak geïnstalleer het gebel en reëlings getref dat hulle so gou moontlik kon begin werk. Meme sou ons elke dag op hoogte hou van die vordering met die nuwe skag. Dit sou tyd neem en ons moes langer in Kaapstad agterbly as wat ons verwag het. Ons het gemik na ’n ekstra week in Kaapstad. Daar was af en toe ’n besoeker

by Madiba, maar die res van die tyd het ’n ongemaklike stilte oor die huis gehang.

Op Woensdag 13 Januarie 2011 het ’n spesialis in ortopediese chirurgie van 2 Militêre Hospitaal Madiba kom ondersoek. Hy het by die sitkamer ingestap terwyl ek en professor Gerwel by Madiba was. Hy het Madiba se knie ondersoek en Madiba het erg oor die pyn gekla. Die dokter het van die mediese personeel gevra om hom na die slaapkamer toe te neem vir ’n deeglike ondersoek. Hy het geskok gelyk toe hy uit die kamer kom. Hy het gesê hy sal met ons in verbinding bly, maar dat hy besorg was dat daar ander onderliggende probleme was wat die oorsaak van die agteruitgang kon wees wat ons die afgelope paar weke by Madiba bespeur het.

Mevrou Machel was in Mosambiek omdat sy haar familie moes voorberei vir haar seun wat lobola moes betaal. Haar familie het selde op haar tyd en aandag staatgemaak, maar hierdie was een van min geleenthede waar haar kinders haar teenwoordigheid in Mosambiek vereis het. Teen dié tyd was generaal Dabula ook in Kaapstad. Die dokter het inligting aan hom oorgedra en sy skok uitgespreek oor die algemene mediese behandeling wat Madiba ontvang het. Hy het ons gevra om Madiba dadelik by die plaaslike militêre hospitaal in Kaapstad te laat opneem. Ek het aangedui dat mevrou Machel daardie aand sou terugkeer en dat dit nie ’n besluit was wat ek kon neem nie. Ons sou op haar terugkeer moes wag, tensy hulle sou aandring dat dit ’n noodgeval is.

Generaal Dabula het gesê hy was meer besorg daaroor dat Madiba huis toe verlang het. Hy het voorgestel dat ons een van die huishoudsters van Johannesburg laat invlieg. Ek het vir hom gesê dat huishoudelike sake en die manier waarop die personeelrooster werk nie deur mediese sake of my sake bepaal word nie en dat Madiba na my mening die afgelope twee jaar al huis toe verlang. Enigeen wat genoeg tyd saam met hom deurgebring het, het geweet, wanneer hy in Johannesburg was, wou hy in Qunu wees en wanneer hy in Qunu was, wou hy in Johannesburg wees. Wanneer hy in Kaapstad was, wou hy in Qunu of Johannesburg wees. Dis net hoe oumense is. Ek het voorgestel dat ons die huishoudelike sake aan mevrou Machel oorlaat. Daar was altyd politiek by die huis, soos wat daar in enige werksomgewing is.

Mevrou Machel het op 14 Januarie laat tuis gekom. Ek het vooraf vir haar ’n teksboodskap gestuur om te sê generaal Dabula en die spesialis wat Madiba ondersoek het wou haar die volgende oggend spreek en sy het ingestem om hulle elfuur te sien. Teen daardie tyd het ek verneem generaal Dabula het besluit om nié die spesialis wat Madiba ondersoek het by die gesprek in te sluit nie, maar eerder ’n derde dokter saam te bring. Dié dokter het nog nie voorheen vir Madiba gesien nie en tog is sy gevra om mevrou Machel oor Madiba se toestand in te lig sonder dat sy hom ondersoek het.

Die Vrydag na ons gim-sessie het ek mevrou Machel na haar motor toe vergesel. Ek het vir haar gesê die spesialis wat Madiba ondersoek het, het vermoed dat daar onderliggende probleme was wat tot sy vinnige agteruitgang gelei het en dat hulle voorgestel het dat Madiba daardie middag in die hospitaal opgeneem moet word. Ek het al hoe meer oor haar ook bekommerd begin raak. Die aanhoudende stres van die familiepolitiek het druk op haar geplaas en ek het gevrees dat ’n skokkende aankondiging soos dié, dat haar man in die hospitaal opgeneem moet word, tot ’n beroerte kon lei. Ons kon nie sonder haar leef en sonder dat sy daar is vir Madiba nie. Die dokters het om halfelf by die huis aangekom en na die gesprek is reëlings getref om Madiba na 2 Militêre Hospitaal toe te neem waar hy ’n reeks toetse sou ondergaan. Daar sou nog talle toetse bykom wat x-strale en skanderings sou insluit.

Baie van Madiba se familielede het al vir my gesê ek moet my uit sy persoonlike lewe hou, maar ek was erg gefrustreerd omdat enige leek kon sien dat dinge nie op die beste moontlike manier hanteer word nie, en dit was duidelik dat die mediese span altyd familiepolitiek moes betrek en dit bo die belange van die pasiënt stel. Dit was ook duidelik dat sommige van die Mandelas die dokters verbied het om enige mediese sake rakende Madiba met my te bespreek. Die feit dat ek hulle op sekere dinge gewys het, het hulle geïrriteer.

By die hospitaal het sake oor die algemeen vlot verloop, behalwe dat Madiba ongemaklik was en nooit van hospitale gehou het nie. Hy wou nie daar wees nie. Saterdagoggend sesuur het ek ’n oproep ontvang van Mike Maponya, wat Madiba se motorbestuurder was vandat hy uit die tronk vrygelaat is en ook as ’n lojale lyfwag opgetree het. My hart het amper gaan staan. Mike het my baie selde gebel en ek

het geweet dit was te vroeg om ’n onbelangrike oproep van hom te ontvang. ’n Mens verwag die ergste. Madiba wou gehad het ek moes so gou as moontlik hospitaal toe kom. Ek moes nog aantrek en gereed maak en het eers ’n rukkie later by die hospitaal opgedaag. Madiba was woedend vir my. ‘Zeldina, jy van alle mense het my versaak en my net hier gelos.’ Hy het in baie jare nie ’n nag in die hospitaal deurgebring nie en het dit verpes. Mike het die situasie probeer verlig deur vir hom te sê Mum sou spoedig daar wees. Ek het aan hom verduidelik daar was mense om na hom om te sien en hom te ondersoek en seker te maak dat dit goed gaan met hom. Gelukkig het mevrou Machel kort daarna aangekom en dit het hom gekalmeer. Dit was moeilik om hom so ongemaklik te sien en ek het so gou ek kon uit die kamer gestap. Ek kon dit nie verduur om hom te sien as dit nie goed gaan met hom nie en hy so gefrustreerd was. Die dokters was heeltyd besig met hom en het verskeie gesprekke agter geslote deure gevoer. Ek was verlig omdat ek geweet het dat hulle nou hul volle aandag aan hom skenk en dat hy in die hande van spesialiste was. Dit was al waaroor ek omgegee het.

Generaal Dabula was nêrens te sien nie en die algemene praktisyn aan diens by Madiba het mangelontsteking opgedoen en was met siekteverlof. Dit was vir my rede tot kommer dat twee van die sleutelrolspelers in Madiba se gesondheidsake nie daar was nie. Mevrou Machel het Madiba se drie dogters van hul pa se opname in die hospitaal ingelig en ek het vir professor Gerwel laat weet. Ek het vir hom gesê dat ek niemand by die stigting daarvan vertel het nie, aangesien dit van kritieke belang was om alles geheim te hou om te keer dat ons by die hospitaal deur die publiek en die media oorweldig word.

Die destydse minister van verdediging, Lindiwe Sisulu, het Madiba Saterdagaand by die hospitaal kom besoek. Sy is die dogter van Madiba se ontslape vriende Walter en Albertina Sisulu en ook ’n niggie van Makaziwe Mandela. In Suid-Afrika is die departement van verdediging verantwoordelik vir die mediese sorg van regerende en voormalige staatshoofde. Ek was nie daar nie, mevrou Machel was. Die minister was ook besorg oor Madiba se gesondheid. Saterdagnag laat het gerugte begin versprei dat Madiba oorlede is. Die regering wou ’n verklaring uitreik dat Madiba in die hospitaal opgeneem is,

maar my raad aan hulle was om dit eerder nie te doen nie sodat sy privaatheid beskerm kon word. Hulle wou net die gerugte stopsit dat hy oorlede is.

In die tussentyd het die stigting my gekontak en gevra of daar enige waarheid in die gerugte van Madiba se dood was. Ek het gesê: 'Madiba lewe, maar praat asseblief met professor Gerwel oor enige ander inligting.' Ek wou nie die een wees wat inligting uitdeel nie, aangesien ek geweet het wat sou gebeur en omdat ek gereeld die skuld gekry het wanneer stories aan die media uitgelek het. Ons het reeds vermoed ons foonoproepe word afgeluister aangesien vertroulike inligting onverklaarbaar uitgelek het. In sulke gevalle is dit beter as senior amptenare die proses bespreek. Daarna is 'n verklaring uitgereik dat Madiba en sy vrou met vakansie was en dat die gerugte van sy dood onwaar was. Ek het die presidensie van hierdie verklaring laat weet en hulle het nie hul verklaring uitgereik nie.

Die Sondag is Madiba uit die hospitaal ontslaan nadat al die spesialiste hom gesien en ondersoek het. Ons het omtrent eenuur die middag by die huis aangekom en die algemene praktisyn wat weens mangelontsteking nie by die werk was nie, was by Madiba se huis in Kaapstad. Ek het by myself gedink kon sy nie daardie oggend hospitaal toe gegaan het om ontslaginstruksies van die spesialiste te ontvang as sy nou gesond genoeg was om na Madiba se huis toe te kom nie? Maar as sy siek was, sou dit seker beter gewees het dat sy van Madiba af wegbly? Is oumense, veral dié wie se gesondheid kwesbaar is, nie méér vatbaar vir infeksies nie?

Maandag en Dinsdag het Madiba begin beter lyk. Dit was duidelik dat die medisyne begin werk.

Teen die Donderdagoggend was ek angstig om van die dokter aan diens te hoor hoe dit met hom gaan, maar ek is toe deur die mediese en veiligheidspersoneel ingelig dat die dokter afwesig was. Toe ek vra waar sy was, het hulle gesê sy het gaan inkopies doen. Dit was een te veel vir my. Hoe kan inkopies 'n prioriteit vir 'n dokter wees drie dae nadat Nelson Mandela uit die hospitaal ontslaan is? Ek het duidelik oor die tou getrap toe ek die dokter bevraagteken het en iemand het my spoedig by die familie verkla.

Mevrou Machel het Maputo toe vertrek vir haar seun Malenga se tradisionele bruilof. Sy is meegedeel dat dit beter gaan met Madiba en

dat dit veilig was vir haar om weg te wees van die huis, hoewel ons onderneem het dat ons in verbinding sou bly en dat ek haar op hoogte sou hou van sy vordering.

Madiba se dogter Zenani sou Saterdag in Kaapstad opdaag. Mevrou Machel het haar gevra om te kom om by haar pa te wees terwyl sy by die bruilof in Mosambiek is. Sy het omtrent tienuur die oggend by die huis opgedaag en haar pa was nog in die bed. Die spesialiste sou elfuur kom om te kyk hoe dit met hom gaan. Zenani, Shirley die huishoudster en ek het in die kombuis gesit en gesels en nie die tyd dopgehou nie. ’n Rukkie na elfuur het ek uitgevra na die spesialiste en ek het gehoor hulle kon nie op hul eie na die huis toe kom nie en het vir opdragte gewag, soos dit in elke militêre burokrasie werk. Hulle sou by die hospitaal opgelaai en na die huis toe gebring word. Toe ek bel om uit te vind of hulle nie self hierheen kon bestuur nie, het hulle gesê dit word nie toegelaat nie. En ek het gedink sê nou maar daar was ’n noodgeval? Moet ons wag dat Pretoria bevele gee vir spesialiste in Kaapstad om by die hospitaal opgelaai te word omdat hulle nie toegelaat word om self te bestuur nie?

Teen dié tyd was ek verby angstigheid en onder veel erger stres. Ek was besorg oor Madiba se gesondheid en het professor Gerwel in sy kantoor in Kaapstad gaan spreek om vir hom te sê die situasie vererger en iemand moet ingryp. As gevolg van al die politiek tussen die mediese personeel en familie was daar geen manier waarop almal oor iets sou ooreenkom nie. Prof was die een na wie ek my oor enigiets en alles gewend het. Madiba het ook selde enige besluite geneem sonder om hom te raadpleeg of sy mening te vra. Mens sou kon sê Prof was die middelpunt wat balans aan Madiba se besluite verleen het. Hy het presies geweet waar die middeweg lê tussen dit wat Madiba wou doen, en dit wat gedoen moes word. Ek was een van min mense wat Prof enige tyd, dag of nag, in die hande kon kry. Hy was by soveel dinge betrokke maar hy het geweet dat ons lewens van hom afhang. Hy het ook geweet hy was die eerste een op wie ek my in enige noodgeval sou beroep. Hy het aangebied om met die minister van verdediging te praat en hulle het ’n afspraak gemaak om mekaar Maandag te spreek ná mevrou Machel se terugkeer uit Maputo.

Toe mevrou Machel Sondag teruggekeer het, het Madiba se toestand verder verswak. Hy wou nie een van ons onder sy oë laat

uitgaan nie en het daarop aangedring dat ons heeltyd by hom bly. Hy was bleek en swak. Hy was ernstig siek. Ek het my daarop voorberei om vir hom totsiens te sê, maar nie voor ek hierdie stryd vir oulaas gestry het nie. Ons moes alles in ons vermoë doen om te verseker dat hy die beste sorg moontlik kry.

Die Maandagoggend is een van die spesialiste aan die span onttrek as gevolg van ’n meningsverskil oor wat die beste manier sou wees om Madiba se sorg te verbeter. ’n Ander spesialis is van 1 Militêre Hospitaal in Pretoria ingevlieg om by die span aan te sluit. Hy het Madiba ondersoek en ernstige kwelvrae gehad. Daar was geen manier waarop ons huis toe kon vlieg met Madiba in sy huidige toestand nie. Hy het gesê Madiba moet teruggaan 2 Militêre Hospitaal toe sodat x-strale van sy bors geneem kon word. Ek het vermoed Madiba het longontsteking. Die meeste oumense se dood is te wyte aan longontsteking of ernstige infeksies. Intussen het mevrou Machel, minister Sisulu en professor Gerwel vergader en mevrou Machel het hulle oor die vorige paar weke se gebeure ingelig. Professor Gerwel was net so besorg soos mevrou Machel en ek oor Madiba se gesondheid en hoe daar na hom omgesien word. Sy het gevoel sy is magteloos en dat sy ondermyn word. Omdat ek my kommer uitgespreek het en omdat die spesialiste almal wit was, het ek gevoel dit het in ’n raskwessie ontaard. Daar was nie ’n uitweg nie tensy professor Gerwel, mevrou Machel en die minister sou ingryp.

Die minister het die moontlikheid oorweeg om die hele span te vervang, maar mevrou Machel het gemeen hulle sou haar figuurlik gesproke wou kruisig as sy sou inmeng by die mense wat deur die familie aangestel is. Dit was vir almal duidelik dat Nelson Mandela veronderstel was om deskundige aandag en mediese sorg te ontvang, ongeag wie deur wie aangestel is. Die minister het aangebied om ’n internasionale span spesialiste bymekaar te roep, maar mevrou Machel het egter ook daarteen gewaak omdat dit gesien kon word as ’n mosie van wantroue in ons eie mediese praktisyns in Suid-Afrika. Sy was reg. Ons het van die beste mediese spesialiste ter wêreld.

Teen die Dinsdag het die spesialis van 1 Militêre Hospitaal ons in kennis gestel dat ons die Woensdag sou teruggaan huis toe. ’n Ambulansvliegtuig is uit Pretoria bestel om Madiba op te laai met al die nodige noodapparaat om hom huis toe te neem. Maretha, my

kollega wat die logistiek hanteer het, het vir my gesê daar is net plek vir vier of vyf passasiers op die vliegtuig as gevolg van al die toerusting, maar dat 'n tweede vliegtuig gehuur sou word om die bykomende mediese en veiligheidspersoneel Pretoria toe te vlieg.

Dinsdagoggend het ek saam met mevrou Machel en Ndaba, Madiba se kleinseun wat die vorige dag daar aangekom het om sy oupa op te pas, by die ontbyttafel gesit. Ek het hulle ingelig oor die sitplekke op die vliegtuie sodat ons kon besluit wie op watter vliegtuig sou reis. Ndaba het gesê hy dring daarop aan om saam met Madiba op die vliegtuig te wees omdat 'n lid van die familie daar moes wees. Mevrou Machel het gesê sy sal die plekke uitsorteer wanneer ons by die vliegtuig aankom, maar dat die mediese personeel eerste oorweeg sou word. Ek het vir haar onthalwe gekrenk gevoel omdat Ndaba eintlik daarmee gesê het sy is nie familie nie. Dit is nie die groot goed wat my seergemaak het nie, maar hierdie klein dingetjies, en natuurlik die feit dat dit Madiba sou seergemaak het as hy moes hoor hoe sy vrou behandel word. Ek het klaar planne begin maak om kommersieel te vlieg, aangesien ek vasbeslote was om nie in die pad te wees nie. Mevrou Machel het gevra of ek dit nie wou heroorweeg en op die tweede vliegtuig reis nie, maar ek het dit van die hand gewys en gesê dit was beter as daar ekstra ruimte oor was vir wie ook al dit wou hê en dat ek nie 'n oorlas wou wees nie.

Ek het met gekruisde bene by Madiba gesit en hy het my been aangeraak asof hy wou voel of ek regtig daar was. My oë het vol trane geskiet en ek moes opstaan sodat hy nie kon sien hoe ontsteld ek was nie. Hy het nie meer met enigiemand gesels nie en 'n mens kon sien hy is baie swak. Ek het nie geweet hoekom hy nie in die hospitaal opgeneem word nie, maar daar is aan my gesê ons vlieg die volgende dag Gauteng toe waar 'n volledige mediese span op hom sou wag om na hom om te sien.

Woensdagoggend het ek vroeg by die huis aangekom. Madiba was by die ontbyttafel en mense het na hom omgesien. Ek het koffie gedrink en iets geëet en toe besluit om koers te kies lughawe toe vir my vlug huis toe. Ek het eers vir mevrou Machel gegroet en nadat ek vir Madiba totsiens gesê het, het ek omgedraai en weggeloop sodat niemand moes sien ek huil nie. Ek het gedink dit was die laaste keer dat ek hom groet. Hy het nie opgehou hoes nie.

By die lughawe was ek angstig en ek het die veiligheidsmense gevra om my te laat weet sodra Madiba se vliegtuig in die lug was. Die besluit en ooreenkoms met die dokter was dat Madiba huis toe geneem sou word van Pretoria af en daarna sou dokter Mike Plit, Madiba se private dokter en internis van meer as twintig jaar, hom kom ondersoek. Madiba het dokter Plit letterlik met sy lewe vertrou. Wanneer Madiba nie wou eet nie weens gebrek aan eetlus, wat soms met die ouderdom gepaardgaan, het ons vir hom gesê dokter Plit dring aan daarop dat hy drie maaltye per dag eet. En dokter Plit hét. Madiba sou dit dan doen. Die gedagte aan dokter Plit wat in Johannesburg wag om na hom om te sien, was dus ’n vertroosting as so iets in dié omstandighede moontlik was.

My vlug was vertraag en Madiba s’n het opgestyg voordat ek aan boord kon stap. Ek was moeg en emosioneel en het my sonbril opgehou soos iemand wat glo sy is beroemd sodat ek my rooigehuilde oë kon wegsteek. Gerugte oor sy gesondheid het begin afneem by die publiek en die media en ek wou nie enige bespiegeling aanvuur as iemand wat ek ken my met my rooi oë sou raakloop nie.

Ek het my heeltemal aan my vriende onttrek en ek wou niemand sien nie. Ek wou nie hê hulle moes agterkom hoe ontsteld ek was nie. Hulle het baie goed geweet my hele lewe draai om Madiba en om hom so te sien is vir my erger as die ergste hartseer wat ek al ervaar het. Ek het nie oproepe ontvang of teksboodskappe beantwoord nie. Ek was ook eensaam omdat ek nie my kommer en pyn met iemand kon deel nie. Ek het elke dag aan professor Gerwel verslag gedoen om hom op hoogte te hou van wat gebeur, maar ek kon met niemand anders praat nie. Niemand het dit vir my gesê nie, maar ek het geweet wat die beste vir my onder die omstandighede was, en dit was om my geheel en al te onttrek.

Gewoonlik slaap ek maklik op vliegtuie of enigiets wat beweeg en ek het die kuns van die ‘kragslapie’ bemeester. Maar op die terugvlug Johannesburg toe kon ek nie ’n oog toemaak nie. Ek was wawyd wakker en bewus van alles wat om my gebeur, al was ek geheel en al uitgeput. Nadat ons geland het, het ek my foon aangeskakel. Ek het op die Gautrein geklim tot in Sandton, waar my broer my sou oplaai en huis toe neem. Ek wou met niemand in die openbaar oor die foon praat nie omdat ek die ergste verwag het.

Die eerste oproep wat ek na my aankoms in Sandton ontvang het was van ons uitvoerende hoof, Achmat Dangor. Hy het gevra of ek weet waar Madiba is en ek het gesê ek hoop hy is al tuis, aangesien hulle Kaapstad voor my verlaat het. Hy het toe vir my gesê hy het oproepe ontvang dat Madiba na die Milpark-hospitaal, ’n private hospitaal in Johannesburg, geneem is. Ek het die veiligheidspersoneel gebel en hulle het vir my gesê hulle het op daardie juiste oomblik by Milpark aangekom. Ek het Achmat teruggebel en bevestig wat die veiligheidsmense vir my gesê het. Teen daardie tyd het die Stigting na oorlegpleging met die familie reeds ’n verklaring uitgereik dat Madiba vir roetinetoetse in Milpark opgeneem is. Ek het aan professor Gerwel verslag gedoen en my kommer uitgespreek oor die verklaring wat uitgereik is. Ek was bekommerd oor die verwysing daarin na ‘roetinetoetse’. Sky News het berig dat hy bedsere het.

Ek is huis toe en was bly om my honde te sien en om by my broer en my kollega van baie jare en my rots, Maretha, te wees. Ek is ’n bietjie later hospitaal toe. Met my aankoms was die dokters besig met Madiba en ek kon hom net deur ’n glydeur sien. Ek het vir hom gewaai en hy het teruggewaai en op een of ander manier het ek geweet dit gaan beter met hom al het hy steeds baie swak gelyk. Hy het longontsteking gehad, of infeksie van sy lugweë soos hulle dit beskryf het, saam met die bedsere en inflammasie in sy knie. Die kombinasie van hierdie dinge was giftig vir sy liggaam.

Nog twee dae het verbygegaan met hospitaalbesoeke tussenin. Teen die tweede dag het ons ’n geheime roete by die hospitaal ontdek waar ons in en uit kon gaan sodat die media my nie kon gebruik, soos die familie dit gestel het, as ’n ‘barometer van Madiba se welstand’ nie. Die media het elke beweging wat ek gemaak het fyn dopgehou en ek het in die koerant saam met Josina op ’n foto verskyn waar ons oor ’n lawwigheid gelag het en hulle het daaruit afgelei dat dit goed gaan met hom. Hy sou die Vrydagmiddag ontslaan word en dit het klaar beter met hom gegaan. Intussen het ek die personeel by die huis ondersteun om alles gereed te kry vir Madiba se terugkeer. By die hospitaal is ’n groot nuuskonferensie gereël terwyl Madiba huis toe geneem is. Die regering het vernuf aan die dag gelê deur die nuuskonferensie te reël en sodoende die media se aandag af te lei. Teen die tyd wat hulle gedink het Madiba staan op die punt om te

vertrek, was hy reeds veilig by die huis.

Op die Saterdag nadat hy ontslaan is, het die Sondagkoerante aan ’n storie gewerk dat daar spanning tussen die stigting en die familie was en dat die regering moes ingryp. Volgens die bespiegeling was dit die rede waarom die eerste verklaring van die stigting na Madiba se hospitalisering nie met enige ander verklarings opgevolg is nie. Dit was nie so nie. Daar was nog altyd spanning tussen Madiba se personeel en sekere faksies in sy familie. Die situasie het dit nie vererger nie. Dis ook verkeerd om te sê ‘die familie’, wat impliseer dat dit die hele familie is.

Soos Madiba oor die jare swakker geword het, het sekere familielede die geleentheid gesien om vir sy amptelike stigting en personeel te sê wat hulle dink ons moet doen en hoe ons dit moet doen. As Madiba sterk genoeg was, sou hy nie toegegee het nie. Hy het vir sy personeel leiding gegee en hulle oor die jare teen baie dinge beskerm en noudat hy verswak het, kon sekere familielede inbeweeg en dinge tot hul voordeel beheer.

Madiba het aangesterk, maar dit het hom tyd geneem om heeltemal te herstel. Tydens sy langdurige siekte het ons probleme begin ondervind om rekenings te vereffen en die huishouding aan die gang te hou. Omdat niemand tekenregte op enige van Madiba se rekenings gehad het nie, moes ons alternatiewe reëlings tref. Terwyl planne agtermekaar gekry is, het ’n familietwis uitgebreek.

Die geveg oor wie Madiba se geldsake beheer het morsiger geword soos die tyd verloop het.

Die banke het my in die verlede altyd gebel om transaksies op Madiba se rekening te bevestig. Omdat hy ’n hoë profiel gehandhaaf het en hulle nie regstreeks met hom kon praat nie, het hulle my gebel wanneer geld inbetaal, getrek of oorgeplaas is, net om die bewegings in sy rekenings te bevestig en om seker te maak dat dit werklik hy was wat die transaksies aangevra het. Met die nuwe volmag wat mevrou Machel en twee van die Mandela-dogters beheer gegee het, het die bank ’n brief van Madiba vereis wat hulle die reg gee om voort te gaan om my te bel om sulke transaksies te bevestig. Ek het al die dokumente voorberei en dit by mevrou Machel afgelewer voordat ek New York toe vertrek het. Ek moes soontoe gaan om met die Clinton-stigting te praat oor nog ’n geldinsamelingsgeleentheid vir die Nelson

Mandela-stigting, en na Tribeca oor ’n gesamentlike projek op Mandela-dag. Ek het nooit tekenregte op enige van Madiba se rekenings gehad nie, maar was net vir die administrasie verantwoordelik. Mevrou Machel wou nie in beheer daarvan wees nie. Ek het dit gehaat as die bank my bel om bewegings in sy rekenings te bevestig. Dit was ’n irritasie. Die stigting het jare tevore ’n boekhouer aangestel om my weg te hou van enige van die regte wat sy geld aanbetref. Ek het dit so verkies. Miskien het ons in ons onderbewuste geweet wat op ons almal wag.

Terwyl ek in New York was, het Makaziwe die Maandagoggend kantoor toe gekom om my te kom soek. Sy kon my nie kry en het vir Achmat gevra waar ek was. Hy het vir haar gesê ek is in New York en sy het gevra wie my toestemming gegee het om te reis. Achmat, as uitvoerende hoof, het gesê hy het en dat ek daar was op amptelike sake vir die stigting. Sy het toe gevra hoekom dit nodig was vir ’n sekretaresse om New York toe te reis. Ek weet nie wat hy geantwoord het nie. Sy het weer gevra hoekom ’n sekretaresse die transaksies moes bevestig wanneer hulle, die Mandelas, dokumente oor Madiba se rekening geteken het. Ek het geweet dis soms beter om nie jou mening oor iets te lug as die situasie vanselfsprekend is nie.

Teen dié tyd het mevrou Machel al haar privaatheid in haar eie huis verloor. ’n Mens kan verstaan dat Madiba dag en nag mediese sorg nodig gehad het, maar haar privaatheid is nooit in ag geneem nie. Verbeel jou dat jy in jou eie huis nie van jou slaapkamer na jou kombuis in ’n kamerjas kon stap nie. Waar jy nooit uit jou kamer kan kom sonder dat jy behoorlik aangetrek is nie omdat daar altyd vreemdelinge in jou huis is. Waar jy altyd op jou hoede moes wees omdat iemand al jou bewegings dophou en afluister.

Nog een van die groot lesse wat ek by Madiba en professor Gerwel geleer het, is dat ’n mens dinge partykeer hul loop moet laat neem en net ’n toeskouer moet wees. Bitterheid sal jou siek maak. Terwyl Madiba in die tronk was, is hy gedwing om in die kalksteengroef te werk. Hy moes stene uitkap sonder enige doel. Bitterheid is net so doelloos. Jy verklein jou eie karakter deur jou tyd met bitterheid te mors. Jy moet toelaat dat dinge gebeur soos dit veronderstel is om te gebeur. Ons kan nie elke situasie verander nie. In my loopbaan wou ek baie keer dadelik op iets reageer, maar met verloop van tyd en met

ouderdom het ek geleer dat sekere dinge net hul loop moet neem. Ek het Madiba oor die jare dopgehou en wanneer hy sy ongeloof oor mense se doen en late weggesteek het, het hy na my mening hulle soms op hierdie manier toegelaat om hul eie geluk of ongeluk te bewerkstellig. Geduld is alles.

12

Saying Goodbye

A few months after his first long hospitalization, it was decided to move Madiba to Qunu. He often asked about people he grew up with or deceased family members. Qunu is a remote area in the Eastern Cape and since it is the place where Madiba got sick the previous December, we met the instruction with scepticism. At home in Johannesburg he was close to medical attention, close friends popped in from time to time and some family occasionally visited. One could call on people like Ahmed Kathrada and George Bizos to pop in to visit him but in Qunu that would be difficult. We didn't know what to expect in Qunu. The family insisted and there was no way that Mrs Machel could object. Madiba was emotionally stable wherever she was, whether that was in Qunu or Johannesburg.

I started travelling to Qunu weekly, through the support of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, or every second week at least. Madiba stopped being talkative but he wanted company. Hardly anyone visited him and Mrs Machel was the only one apart from the medical staff and household staff that he had around him. Qunu is remote and it was difficult to travel there. One had to set an entire day aside to travel there and back and it would mean getting up at 3 a.m. and arriving back home at 8 p.m. if you only went for the day. It was probably not easy for everyone to travel there but Qunu became quiet and isolated.

* * *

It was announced at the Foundation that the organization was about to restructure to focus more on its core work. I understood and

supported the fact that the Foundation had to become a Centre of Memory, similar to a Presidential Library, to preserve his legacy. Madiba supported the setting up of a Centre of Memory, and the conversion of the Foundation in to a non-governmental organization specializing in memory and dialogue work. He launched the project in 2004, and during the years thereafter made donations of private papers, gifts and awards to the Nelson Mandela Foundation for the Centre's permanent archival collections. However I didn't agree that Madiba's office had to be closed. While Madiba was alive people wanted to remain connected with him even though it was not personally possible for him to reciprocate. His friends and associates, people who all had relationships with him, wanted to feel acknowledged. By closing Madiba's office that would become impossible. But it was expected that we should close his office and transfer relationships to people who did not have the institutional memory our office had. It was envisaged that his friends would be treated as part of the process which I felt would lack acknowledging their respective individual relationships.

Prof. Gerwel and Mrs Machel protested and said that Madiba deserved to have an office and a Personal Assistant to the day he died. Prof. Gerwel, who was Chairman of the Foundation, said that Madiba handpicked me and that he would refuse to sign off on me being made completely redundant when Madiba made that choice when he was in a position to choose the people around him. Madiba's office was closed and we were all made redundant, although I was reinstated on a part-time basis. But I was undermined and sidelined to such an extent that my position really became a ceremonial job. Both Maretha and Thoko, the other two staff members, with equally long service histories with Madiba, were told to go. I had luckily never been in it for the money, and I had been rewarded in ways money can never buy, and decided that I would remain committed to Madiba and Mrs Machel even if I was not paid anything. Loyalty and dedication can't be bought or paid to go away. I had also made a promise to myself and to him that I would never desert him until indeed the last day.

* * *

By the start of 2012 Madiba was permanently living in Qunu. I would travel there every week for a day or two to spend time with him. On 28 February 2012 I worked my last day as a full-time employee for

Nelson Mandela. I didn't expect the next day to be any different but it was. I suddenly felt empty and without purpose. I know Madiba wouldn't have allowed it, but he was no longer making decisions or able to voice his wishes. In fact, he seemed to be slowly distancing himself from us. He was visibly old, needed permanent care and was no longer the jovial man we knew.

I was informed by the Foundation's CEO that my rank had to be changed from Executive Personal Assistant to Personal Assistant. In eighteen years I had gone from Typist to Assistant Private Secretary to Private Secretary to Manager and Spokesperson for his office and now finally back to Personal Assistant. It was actually laughable that love, care, loyalty and trust could take you on that roller-coaster ride.

I never had any aspirations to become anything other than whatever served his best interests, and I was not fazed by these latest attempts to marginalize me. You see, if Nelson Mandela believes in you, handpicks you and defends you until he is no longer able to do so, despite even criticism from the party that moulded him, little else should distract you in life. I never used these events to defend myself but allowed things to happen as they were probably supposed to happen. I never referred to the fact that I was chosen as I thought that it could be interpreted that I am conceited, but I always believed that there would come a time when I had to defend myself and on that day I would rationally think differently about things.

It is, I believe, one of the least attractive characteristics of us Afrikaners: we are brought up believing that we deserve nothing, we are nothing and we can accomplish nothing. Well, those who have achieved did so sterlingly and managed to raise themselves beyond these mental limitations. I really had to work hard at accepting the fact that I was chosen by Madiba to be anything. The upside is that you never ponder about these things and that probably prevents you from becoming absorbed with self-importance. I am the first to admit that I am nothing, was nothing, without Madiba gracing and blessing my life.

The poison within the family was leaking out everywhere. Many of his family had never wanted me around, and they were now getting their chance. But I still refused to abandon him. They didn't want me to fly down to Qunu every week to see him and I heard them asking our CEO 'What does she do there?' Even if I had to find a sponsor to fly me to Qunu every week for me to see him, I was willing to look for that. It was just Mrs Machel, household and medical staff there. He

was lonely. President Zuma passed through from time to time and so did a few very close friends who went through the trouble to make the tedious trip to Qunu, but more and more he became isolated from the rest of the world. Whenever someone important visited, there would, however, be a sudden influx of interested parties. And from time to time we called on people like Ahmed Kathrada and other old friends to visit for the day, and one could see how they lifted his spirit whenever they came around.

Madiba always appeared very happy to see me. There was very little conversation but whenever Mrs Machel was around he enjoyed watching us converse and exchanging stories. He needed life around him. He needed people to touch him, care for him and create a sense of normality around him, so that he would not feel left behind. Some days the totality of our conversation would be: 'Oh Zeldina, you are here. How are your parents?' and I would tease him and say, 'Are you not going to ask how I am, Khulu?' and his shoulders would shrug with laughter. He would drowse off and wake up only to reach out to your hand. He did so with most visitors.

It was decided that the house in Qunu needed refurbishment and Madiba returned to Johannesburg for a while. Weeks quickly passed and it was easier to visit him more often. On a particular Friday afternoon Mrs Machel and I spoke about the son of Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands who had been seriously injured after a skiing accident. Mrs Machel tried to reach the Dutch royal family to convey our support. We had been close to them and therefore felt personally affected by the news.

That Friday night I went to bed thinking of the family in suffering. I sometimes put my phone on silent when I go to bed and the next morning I slept in for a little while. When I woke and picked up my phone I noticed that something was wrong. I had seven missed calls and sixteen messages. We were no longer working and there was no reason for the amount of communication in normal circumstances. The first message I opened was from Robyn Curnow, a journalist friend: 'Madiba is in hospital.' I responded: 'What, are you serious, how do you know?' She then told me it had been all over the news. I traced things back and discovered that indeed he was in hospital. I knew nothing. No one had told me. I contacted Josina and she confirmed it. She didn't know any details either. I then texted Mrs Machel to ask whether they were OK. I told her not to give me any detail of where or when but simply to tell me whether they were OK,

as I didn't want to be blamed if it leaked. She gave me a brief overview about what was happening.

I don't know of any person alive who has been treated with the amount of disrespect that people have shown towards Mrs Machel. Politics within the family about his funeral took place for years before his death. In April 2005 the first article about funeral arrangements and a special committee dealing with such eventualities appeared in the Noseweek magazine. Mrs Machel and some of the children had refused to be party to arrangements about Madiba's funeral. He was still in fairly good health and it was unthinkable to be planning someone's funeral while the person was still happily alive, still being cared for by his wife. It is only much later in 2013 when the Minister of Defence Nosiviwe Nqakula empathetically reeled Mrs Machel in that she was consulted about certain arrangements and briefed about what had been planned. I do know that Mrs Machel had to put up a fight to get my name added to the funeral list. I made a promise to him though. I was going to be there right to the end, even if it meant I had to stand at a fence outside his farm in Qunu when they laid him to rest. Unbeknown to me, that would be close to the truth.

It is true what Madiba referred to sometimes . . . to test a man's character, give him power. Once people have power they will always reveal themselves.

Every time Madiba was admitted to hospital we held our breath. I knew by now that I had to seclude myself when he was hospitalized. I became a hermit at such times, not speaking to anyone, not answering my phone or even having conversations with my parents. I would not speak to anyone but Prof. Gerwel, Mrs Machel and Josina. They understood that if I was ever seen to break trust or leak information, I would simply be refused access to Madiba for the rest of my life because then the family would have reason to get rid of me. I was not going to give them that pleasure and I kept my distance and relied on updates from Mrs Machel. I was also becoming worried about her. She had a huge burden to deal with. The family was as divided as ever while she was worried sick about her husband's wellbeing.

* * *

At work pressure finally subsided from the public and apart from a few people who could not comprehend that Madiba would ever stop being actively involved, correspondence and requests became less.

There was always that one request or proposal that someone thought had to be the exception to the rule and people would find reasons beyond logic why Nelson Mandela was the only one to support their ventures, or at least lend his association to endorse their efforts. I had realized over the years that if you continuously do negative things in your job, like saying no to people, it inevitably has a very negative impact on your psyche. You tend to become cynical by nature and it takes constant effort to pull yourself back from that negativity. With fewer requests and the negativity that came with them it was easier to find balance in life. I was opening myself to the next phase of my life.

People often ask me whether I don't regret not getting married or having children. It would be selfish and extremely ungrateful to use 'regret' when describing my life. I gained so much being with Madiba but I suppose I gave him my youth, and perhaps I gave him my future too. But I will never blame him for it – ultimately, I made that choice. Was it sacrifice? Or not? I don't feel burdened or sad that I might have lost oppportunities. I gained so much. I gained myself. I am completely content with the life that I have.

My part-time status and compromised income meant that I had to generate a salary and find something to challenge me again. I still had limited responsibility to Madiba and was adamant that I was not going to take another full-time job unless I was financially forced to do so. I was determined that I wanted to remain available to Madiba and Mrs Machel whenever they needed me, and I needed to make myself useful, but it was impossible and illogical to think that you could find another part-time job and be available to someone else when there was a need for it.

It is the weirdest experience though. From being on a constant adrenalin rush for about eighteen years to a complete shutdown of that adrenalin overnight is not a joke. One needs to find purpose. It was hard. Certain factions within the family still wanted me out. On the first day of the 'rest of my life', 1 March 2012, I had a tattoo engraved around my left pulse to be reminded what I had discovered about myself along this journey. 'Pursue your passion.' As long as I did that, I knew I would be happy for the rest of my life. My passion is to serve and I find fulfilment when I serve people. I had the words tattooed in French because I also wanted to remind myself for the rest of my life about what Madiba had said: 'Find your roots', and since my family is of French descent I wanted the words in French.

* * *

The first few months of my new life were difficult. I still went to the office from time to time to do some administration and then went to see Madiba occasionally. It was announced that he would return to Qunu once they had renovated the house there. So soon I was back in my routine of travelling to Qunu weekly or every second week. Sometimes Madiba was talkative, sometimes he wasn't. Sometimes Mrs Machel and I would debate for the entire day about whatever was happening in the world and South Africa, the politics in the ANC, and world events like the Arab Spring and developments in other African countries, and occasionally Madiba would just smile at us with approval of the liveliness around him. We would sit in the lounge and converse, with Madiba suddenly pointing out to me that my handbag was on the floor and that I needed to pick it up. He was always there and totally aware of things happening around him. Sometimes I would call Prof. for Madiba just to say hello to him over the telephone. It always lit up Madiba's face whenever he heard Prof.'s voice. 'Oh Jakes,' he would say. 'I am happy to speak to you.' While sitting with him Madiba often drifted off into a nap in his favourite chair but then would suddenly wake up to check that we were still there. And once one thinks your privileges come to an end, there's sometimes even more. I had the most precious and valuable times there with them then.

Whenever Mum wasn't there, he would repeatedly ask: 'Where is Mum? When is she returning?' and then you had to recite the day of the week and exactly when she would be back. Mrs Machel and I would sometimes pass each other in mid-air – she would be off to Johannesburg for the day and I would visit Qunu – and by the end of the day it felt like Madiba asked one about two hundred times: 'Where is Mum?' He was totally reliant on her presence and unsettled whenever she was not around.

People were busy and hardly anyone visited. It was really a schlep to get there, in addition to the fact that Madiba didn't feel like seeing people every day so it was not always easy to invite even his closest friends for social visits. We stopped scheduling visits by people who weren't very familiar to him, but of course later realized that whenever we were not there occasionally some of the family would take advantage of our absence and take strangers to see Madiba. The Foundation then had to defend Madiba again when photos or reports of such visits appeared in the media. People would say: 'But if so and

so got to see him, why can't I?' and the battles would start all over again, with us trying to diplomatically tell them that we didn't approve of the visits as we had been instructed that visitors would not be allowed any longer. On some occasions the Foundation declined a particular request for him to endorse or sign something, or even see certain people, and then would learn afterwards that the request had been agreed by someone in the family and they had allowed whatever to happen when Mrs Machel or I wasn't there. Some people started to take advantage of this when they realized that he no longer had the ability to argue or stand by his principles. Business people would call us to ask about strange requests they'd received from Madiba personally.

Madiba no longer really talked a lot so it was awkward to take people to him who didn't know him. There would be uncomfortable silences during visits.

By now I had moved from the neighbourhood I had so loved in Johannesburg because I could simply not afford to live there any longer. I was now staying on the outskirts of Johannesburg, which made travelling to and from the city a daily challenge. I wasn't bound to office hours but I had to watch my finances. I also started missing the friends and closeness I shared with people from my neighbourhood and I had to stop myself getting depressed. I felt neglected by the Foundation and removed from my friends and I realized that I had not built a steady support structure for myself over the years. Generally people were also getting on with their lives and I really had to struggle to find my feet again and pull myself together. I also lacked the courage to share my fears with many of my friends, probably also because I knew people perceived me to be a strong person and I had to keep up appearances. I also missed politics and having inside information about everything that happened in our country.

* * *

Prof. Gerwel hadn't seen or spent time with Madiba in many months and we decided that we had to make a special trip for him to go and visit Madiba. In August 2012 Prof. and I agreed on a date and I met him in East London, from where I drove him the 260 km to Qunu to see Madiba. We had a very special day and both Madiba and Prof. enjoyed seeing each other. They had a few good laughs and when I

left to take Prof. back to East London that afternoon it crossed my mind that this was really an exceptionally enjoyable day for Madiba.

I loved Prof. but I think Madiba loved him even more. Mrs Machel also hardly ever saw Prof. and enjoyed spending time with him. We left agreeing that Prof. would start writing about Madiba's Presidency. Prof. and I drove back to East London and laughed about the years in the Presidency, the many things that had happened, the stressful times, and we both agreed that if we had known what lay ahead we would probably have made different choices when we were not so emotionally attached to Madiba. The three hours back to East London took us on a journey through memories of eighteen years, and when we said our goodbyes at the airport I knew Prof. was happy and pleased about the day he had spent with Madiba. He sent a text message later that evening when he got home, thanking me that I'd insisted he made time in his busy schedule to be with Madiba. He was engaged on so many fronts, served on countless boards and was involved in so many things but I was happy that I forced him to take a day out to travel so far to see Madiba.

When a few months later I received the news that Prof. had died, I was sleeping in my bed in the Holiday Inn in Umtata, about 40 km away from Qunu. When Madiba was told by Mum of Prof.'s passing the sadness and sense of loss was visible in his eyes and he went completely quiet for hours. It is difficult to tell how a person of that age will react to such news and Mrs Machel had to ensure that her timing was impeccable so as to soften the blow of such a shock. She was scheduled to travel to Johannesburg for the day but subsequently cancelled her travels to be with Madiba, uncertain how he would digest such shock and sadness.

It is difficult to try and put value to Prof. Gerwel's role in the previous eighteen years of our lives. Take whatever you believe anyone could mean to you and multiply it by 100. That's more or less it. Prof. had a way of dealing with things in the most unconventional ways. When we all tended to grapple with a particular issue he would be the one to come up with the most balanced solution that would make everyone feel that they were winners, even though they were actually compromising in a way, as Koos Bekker, the CEO of Naspers, put it at his funeral. He was definitely not a push-over and people easily respected him. He would watch things silently from a distance and then make one pronouncement to steer the issue in a totally new direction and thereby assist you to come up with your own solutions.

He listened to every word I ever said to him, no matter how mundane or how much complaining I did, and if I was wrong he was the one person to honestly and openly but respectfully point it out to me.

During Madiba's Presidency Prof. used to travel with us a lot and he was very involved in our everyday lives. After retirement from government that involvement diminished but Prof. was always just a phone call away. I could call him from anywhere in the world to ask his advice on any matter. And he would be my first point of contact whether it was a major incident or something really stupid or funny that happened. We gossiped and joked, but then when it came to serious matters he was a leading father-figure to me. He loved his Afrikaans and we would have very open, honest conversations and, in joking, then sometimes use very expressive Afrikaans sayings that made us both laugh. He was a person who related to anyone in any situation and he role-played perfectly. He could guide a conversation with a foreign head of state and the next minute address the most junior office staff and make them feel like their interaction was more enjoyable than that of the more important people.

On the day of Prof.'s memorial, Chief Justice Arthur Chaskalson also passed away. He was appointed by Madiba as the head of the Constitutional Court in South Africa, the most senior judicial position in the country. Minutes before we entered the memorial, I received a message from the Judge's son to tell me his dad had died. One of our favourite ministers, Trevor Manuel, was presiding as programme director during Prof.'s memorial and I told him about the Judge's passing. So before proceedings started we also observed a minute of silence for Judge Chaskalson. Two key figures in our lives that passed on in one week. It was too much to bear. I was heartbroken: the one person I expected to be by our side right to the end was Prof. I was also angry, in a way, that he wouldn't be there the day we buried Madiba. But such is life. Whenever Madiba spoke about mortality or people started discussing his, I realized that any of us could go before him. And Prof. leaving us was proof of it.

* * *

A few months before, the security personnel with Madiba, Mrs Machel and some household staff noticed that two new people had joined the medical team looking after Madiba. Mum, security, some of the household staff and I wondered if they could possibly be intelligence

agents. The permanent medical team looking after Madiba didn't know them either. I sent a message to President Zuma's office to ask whether they were aware of this arrangement. I received a response that they would look into the matter and get back to me. I heard nothing. So I sent another message, this time adding 'this situation could potentially cause a huge embarrassment to government as this is clearly infringing on Madiba and his family's privacy and dignity.'

I immediately received a response that the matter was reported to the Minister of Intelligence and that I could expect a response from him soon. And so I did. Minister Siyabonga Cwele called me minutes later to enquire about the situation and again about an hour later informing me that the staff did not belong to National Intelligence but that he would still discuss the matter with the Surgeon General to assess whether the military approved of such placement. I repeated to the Minister what I said in the text to the Presidency. I never heard from the Minister again, but three weeks later these two characters disappeared and then reappeared a few weeks later despite our enquiry. We could never figure out their mission. I was disgusted at how I understood state resources were being used and there is little else that angered me as much. Influences were at play that allowed people to abuse state resources for their own benefit. We had a terrible problem with corruption within government – probably the biggest threat to our democracy – and this was a clear example of a corrupt government that allows this kind of interference in their business.

* * *

Kgalema Motlanthe was our Deputy President at the time. His relationship with Madiba dated back many years in the ANC. Madiba was very fond of Kgalema and he hadn't seen him for some time. A visit was arranged to Qunu on Friday, 7 December. On Thursday I was made aware of Kgalema's intention to visit. I was happy to hear that but had no intention myself to get onto another plane that week. Then suddenly Kgalema's office called to say that the visit was cancelled from our side. Meme, the housekeeper, told me that Madiba was not having a good day but in order to control wild speculation she had asked the Deputy President's office to cancel the visit from their side. But now the Deputy President wanted to know from me what the reason was for cancelling the visit. The ANC's national conference was

planned to start in a week from that day. We all had our suspicions whether there was any political interference about the cancellation of his visit. I called back to say that it was really just that Madiba was not having a good day. It was an awkward situation. Yet, by now, we were used to Madiba just not feeling up to seeing people on some days and he would prefer to stay in bed. We really assumed it was one of those days.

On Saturday, 8 December I was in a radio studio when Achmat Dangor called. By now I had agreed to co-present a Saturday lifestyle show on a local radio station. I couldn't take the call and called him back as soon as the show ended. He said that there was speculation about Madiba's health and that the Sunday papers were trying to put a reason to the cancellation of Kgalema's visit. I called Meme and she assured me again that Madiba was fine. I could actually hear him talk in the background while on the phone to her and I called Achmat back to tell him that. The phone didn't stop ringing.

Two hours later it was on the news. Madiba had been admitted to hospital in Pretoria for a routine medical check-up. And again my response was 'What?' I sent Mrs Machel a text: 'Mum are you OK? I hear Madiba is in hospital.' She didn't read or respond to the message at first. We suspected that our phones and conversations were being monitored. In South Africa, if you pose a threat to the stability of the country, or you plan an act of terrorism, your phone could be tapped. We did neither of these but we wondered if government officials including medics were under instructions from some of the family to report Mrs Machel's every move to them. I later got a call from Meme explaining that they had been told by the medical team not to tell anyone what was happening, but indeed that Madiba had been taken to Pretoria to a hospital. I didn't understand this. Why did they have to rush him so secretively to Pretoria?

Again we started holding our breath. This was just unbelievable. I am not superstitious at all but couldn't help thinking that Prof. may have gone first to prepare for Madiba, and my own thoughts scared me. Soon Mrs Machel told me what was going on and I could hear that she was under tremendous pressure. She was stressed, worried and concerned. It was clear that I had to wait for the storm to pass before I could try to go and see him. Eventually Josina and I went off to see him a few days later. I was anxious and didn't want to make the same mistake as I'd done with Prof. – by the time I managed to visit Prof. in hospital in Cape Town before he passed away he was already

unconscious and I didn't want a repeat of that. Madiba recognized me and briefly interacted with me and that calmed me down. I just needed him to say 'Oh Zeldina' and I would be fine. I relied, like everyone in the world, on him being well. We spent some time with Mum and then we left.

The public were anxious about events as the government failed to issue regular statements to update them on his progress. By now we had been told that the government would handle all communication around his well-being and I had no desire or wish to interfere with that task. I knew too well how difficult it was to deal with things around Madiba – something very few people wanted to ever give me credit for – and now it was their turn and I was happy about that while I dealt with my own emotions.

I was deeply troubled about Madiba's illness and as with any ninety-four-year-old his condition changed every day. One day it was good, the next day it was not so good. I soon packed my things and left to go to my parents for the holiday. I couldn't take it any more and I was unable to visit him.

While on holiday Mrs Machel sent me a message one day to say that Madiba was doing better and that he had started calling one of the white nurses 'Zeldina', and that she thought he missed me. There was nothing I could do. As much as I wanted to be there, I also had to be with my parents for Christmas. I could no longer see Madiba regularly or just pop in, and I silently hoped that he didn't think I really neglected him. My parents were also getting old and I was starting to realize that they too were not going to be around for ever. I had neglected them for years as a result of my job, more than seven years not spending Christmas with them while I was organizing children's Christmas parties in Qunu; it was time to correct that and spend time with them.

* * *

When I arrived back from visiting my parents at the coast over Christmas Madiba was discharged from hospital and settling in back at home. I resumed my, now limited, duties at the Foundation and tried to keep busy as much as possible. Some days I really got depressed, staying in bed the entire day. It was not healthy. As much as I wanted to see Madiba I was mindful also that certain staff members in the household texted or called Makaziwe to report to her whenever I was

in the house to visit him. I was waiting for them to tell me that I wasn't welcome.

It was time for the first screening of the documentary Miracle Rising, in London. It was a powerful story of South Africa's transition between 1990 and 1994. Although questions were asked of the interviewees about Madiba's role in the transitional period, the focus was very much on Cyril Ramaphosa and Roelf Meyer, who led the negotiations for a peaceful settlement between the ANC and the National Party at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa). The production company flew me to London for the screening at end January as part of the production team. I hadn't travelled in a while and was excited to leave the country. The screening was well received and I was proud to have been involved when I saw the final product. I enjoyed seeing people I had lost contact with or no longer regularly had dealings with since we stopped travelling. I wasn't overly impressed with all the celebrities who were interviewed in the documentary but understood that for it to appeal to the broader public the celebs were the selling factor. I liked contributing to history in this way as I could comprehend the difficulties we faced at the time. The documentary was also aired in South Africa and was well received.

On 14 February 2013, the Paralympic athlete Oscar Pistorius shot and killed his model-girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp when he allegedly mistook her for an intruder. The country went into a complete state of shock. One of our heroes had fallen, and with him our hope, and everything the new South Africa embodied, the miracle, somehow stumbled. I don't know why it mattered so much, but we all felt a sense of loss that Valentine's Day. People, especially South Africans, always wanted a hero. Madiba was every man's hero and so was Oscar for overcoming his disability and putting South Africa on the map. People idolized him. Madiba always warned against people idolizing others, including him, too much. He knew too well that one could easily fall. We'd put Oscar on a pedestal so high that the fall was greater than we could have anticipated.

In Conversations With Myself, Madiba wrote in a letter to Winnie Mandela on 9 December 1979:

> We are told that a saint is a sinner who keeps on trying to be clean. One may be a villain for 3/4 of his life and be canonized because he lived a holy life for the remaining 1/4 of that life. In real life we deal, not with gods, but with ordinary humans like ourselves: men

> and women who are full of contradictions, who are stable and fickle, strong and weak, famous and infamous, people in whose bloodstream the muckworm battles daily with potent pesticides.

He believed that there was good and bad in every human being and made me change my thinking about people whenever something like this happened. I realized again how much Madiba had changed my thinking and perceptions about things we consider straightforward.

* * *

On 9 March 2013 Madiba was back in hospital. I was told by Mrs Machel that it wasn't serious but for a simple medical procedure. Again it was a reminder of just how vulnerable he was. Every time he got admitted to hospital, I was reminded that my time with him was becoming limited.

On 22 March after his discharge I tried to visit Madiba three times. The first time I arrived at his house, Makaziwe was there. She had made it clear in a previous discussion about me that I was not welcome to see her father. I no longer had work to do there. I was adamant that she was not to determine that and decided that I would try and avoid her but that I would not stay away just because it pleased her. Mum had to defend me once again, arguing that she was willing to defend Madiba's decisions whether they liked it or not, and that she was going to see that his wishes were fulfilled until the day he passed on. She told them that my presence from time to time provided him with emotional stability and when I heard that she said that I quietly thought: Yes, my emotional stability too, selfish as it may seem. I couldn't help but feel that one gets chewed and then spat out when people no longer see a use for you. I know too well how Madiba would feel about that, but it is not my place to try and judge how or what he may have felt at this stage. I was torn between fighting and leaving things to play out, and the latter seems to be the lesson I'll take with me.

The second time, at around 3 p.m., when I wanted to visit again, Makaziwe was still there. By now Mrs Machel had left for her office. I decided to return home and agreed with Mrs Machel to return at 6 p.m. I hadn't seen Madiba in two weeks and planned to spend time with my family for the days to follow and was therefore eager to see Madiba before I left. At 6 p.m. when I went back to the house Makaziwe had gone. Mrs Machel was seeing someone when I arrived

and because I also had business to discuss with her, I agreed to wait until she had finished.

It seemed to me that, as usual, the household staff that sided with Makaziwe texted or called her to tell her that I was there. Soon she arrived again. Mysteriously the staff disappeared as I was waiting in the kitchen. Makaziwe entered and closed the door behind her. She said: 'Oh I've been wanting to talk to you about something for some time. There are rumours going around that you are working on a documentary film with the History Channel entitled "Mandela: The Last Years". I wanted to say to you that since you are one of the people Tata trusted most, it would be highly unethical of you to do something like that.'

What surprised me was that she admitted for the first time in her life that I had any role to play in her father's life. She had probably heard about the Miracle Rising documentary, which did not focus on Madiba at all, and confused the two issues but I was not bothered to correct her. My commitment was to her father and my trust relationship is with him. I am committed to protecting his dignity and integrity and that of his wife but my commitment does not go beyond that. People may then argue, why am I talking about it now? But I feel this is different. I am not infringing his dignity. This is not an account of his medical state or how illness and suffering affected him. There are many things that I will never talk or write about. My relationship was with Madiba. Not with the family or anyone else.

As the conversation was heating up Mrs Machel called for me. Saved by the bell, I thought, or I may have said things I would later regret. I briefly saw her and left without seeing Madiba as Makaziwe had gone upstairs to be with her father and I knew she would chase me out. I was deeply disappointed about not seeing him but angry enough to realize that it would not be the best time for me to persist trying to do so. The next week I returned and managed to see him. His face lit up when he saw me and he exclaimed: 'Oh Zeldina, you are here.' 'Yes Khulu I am, how are you?' He just gave me a thumbs-up and then said: 'How are your parents?' I was so incredibly touched. He no longer spoke much and this was again the extent of our entire conversation that day, but he had it in him to ask about my parents. How inexplicably had this man changed my life, my thinking and, most importantly, my heart! I sat with him for a while holding his hand and when he dozed off I left.

A few days later news broke of Zenani and Makaziwe challenging

the appointment of Madiba's long-time friend George Bizos, his lawyer Bally Chuene and Comrade Minister Tokyo Sexwale to a trust that managed the sale of artworks from the 'hands and art' project. Madiba appointed these trustees to oversee matters on his behalf. This was going to be an ugly fight. I was deeply disturbed by the news and thought (or was under the impression) that the matter had been resolved a few months before. As these private matters never concerned me I didn't bother enquiring about them often. Insults and counter-allegations followed in the media, each party feeding information to their own sources and lashing out in the most disrespectful way towards one of Madiba's oldest friends, Advocate Bizos. What effectively happened was that Zenani and Makaziwe were challenging their father's decisions. They knew very well that he was no longer able to defend himself or his decisions and it was the time for them to challenge these as they knew no one could rely on Madiba's evidence any longer.

I was not going to enter into their private business now but agreed with the trustees' lawyer that if and when called upon I would support their defence. My resolution was easy. If Madiba wanted to appoint any of his children in charge of his affairs, he would have done so when he was able to. And I was willing to defend his decisions with the facts at hand. The same applied to appointing staff and people in charge of his charities, and his lawyers could vouch for that.

Later it emerged in the lawyer's defending affidavit that indeed Zenani Dlamini and Makaziwe Mandela were acting against their father's wishes. The lawyer produced proof of minutes from meetings that we all remembered too well when Madiba made his wishes very clear. The case was then withdrawn.

I had to remind myself that this was not my battle to fight. I had to focus on ensuring that Mrs Machel had the support she needed and that I gave Madiba the occasional hug and smile and held his hand. I often found Zoleka, one of Madiba's grandchildren, with him whenever I visited during this time. She was the mother of Zenani Jnr, who was killed in the car accident in 2010 just prior to the FIFA World Cup opening. Zoleka wasn't threatened by my presence and was comfortable with me sitting with her grandfather. She had really made an effort to spend time with him almost every day and I could see that he enjoyed it.

* * *

On 27 March 2013 Madiba was admitted to hospital again. He had pneumonia again. A few days before I had visited him in the house and recall one of the housekeepers having a terrible flu while I was there. As I left I shook my head in disbelief. And here he was back in hospital with pneumonia. At that age he was much more susceptible to germs. Yet in his own household people were working even though they were sick. If they were sick, why where they still there? One just has to know when to give up. Not because you want to, but because you have to.

And once again the world held its breath. These were the most difficult times I had ever experienced. I've grown to realize that it is good that one never knows what lies ahead because you would easily give up at an early stage. Whatever I had thought were the worst experiences, these were, by far, the most stressful times of anxiety and uncertainty. I was desperate to go to the hospital but realized that I had to stay away as long as Makaziwe was there. I wanted to spare Madiba an altercation and I was simply willing to take the lead from Mrs Machel and Josina as to when I could visit. On the day that they agreed, Josina drove me in. We noticed the media camping outside the hospital and were fearful that they caught us both on camera. Like in 2011, if we were to appear in the media together I was afraid that I would experience what I felt to be outrage from some of the family. When we left, we agreed that I would hide on the back seat to avoid anyone seeing me. As much as we were tense and stressed about Madiba, we had some relief laughing about my lying down on the seat. I felt like I was a Cold War spy being driven from East Berlin to West Berlin. Madiba stayed in hospital for eleven nights and was then moved back to Johannesburg.

Once he recovered satisfactorily, Mrs Machel and I planned to have some of his old colleagues and friends visit occasionally. Weeks before, the ANC executive asked to pay a visit to Madiba. On the day I contacted them to come for the visit, they had some crisis to attend to and asked to postpone. I responded telling them to please tell us when they were ready as we would encourage them to visit. But then Madiba fell ill again and some weeks passed without either party following up on the matter.

By early 2013 Dr Mamphela Ramphele announced that she was establishing a new political party with the aim of contesting the general elections to be held in 2014. The only sizeable opposition to the ruling ANC party is the Democratic Alliance, a party largely still

seen as dominated by white people even though they are much more liberal than the old Nationalist Party. Dr Ramphele is a well-respected academic in South Africa, a former activist against apartheid and a leading businesswoman. She is also a trustee of the Nelson Mandela Foundation since its inception. Her announcement was welcomed by a lot of people, but the party, Agang, seemed to lose momentum fast. Dr Ramphele was the first person to advise Madiba on health matters after his release in 1990. She introduced him to the cardiologist who treated him for many years until the Defence Force medical team took over his care from private specialists. Dr Ramphele was therefore an old friend to Madiba and a good friend to Mrs Machel. She paid a visit to Mrs Machel on a particular day when Madiba was well enough to sit downstairs in his lounge. She saw him and was disturbed about his deterioration as she hadn't seen him in a very long time. Her visit was brief but she then mistakenly announced in a radio interview that she had seen him.

A week before, the Democratic Alliance had launched its election campaign entitled 'Know your DA'. Part of the campaign was to inform the public of the DA's policy and in doing so they used a picture of their founder, the late Mrs Helen Suzman, where she walked with Madiba, him embracing her. This made the ANC nervous and they lashed out at the DA for using an image of Madiba in their election campaign. The DA's campaign as well as Dr Ramphele's visit made the ANC unnecessarily nervous. No one had ever contested the fact that Madiba was part and parcel of the ANC and that it was a lifelong commitment, yet these interactions made the ANC somehow feel challenged over their 'ownership' of Madiba.

The Reverend Jesse Jackson was in South Africa to receive a national award from President Zuma for his contribution to the liberation struggle of South Africa. Rev. Jackson wanted to see Madiba and someone from the Presidency contacted me, telling me that the President wanted him to ask me about a possible visit to Madiba. Madiba was really not well enough to receive visitors and especially not people he was not very familiar with. I explained to the gentleman from the Presidency that a visit was not possible and he responded that he understood and would convey the sentiments to the President and Rev. Jackson.

One of the people who was on our list to visit Madiba as soon as he was well enough was Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe, who had been trying and asking to see Madiba for months. He had

contested the Presidency of the ANC at their national conference in December 2012 and had lost. He was sidelined by the party and it was clear that his challenge to President Zuma was not well received by all. Madiba was very fond of Kgalema and Mrs Machel and I discussed a possible visit. On the Friday night I contacted Kgalema's assistant to say that we would try something the following week, providing that Madiba was well enough. I told him not to repeat our conversation to anyone.

Since my contract had been changed by the Foundation and I only worked part time for them, there were certain days I didn't go to Johannesburg, when I didn't have work to do on that particular day or when I decided to work from home. On that Monday I was busy with something else and on my motorbike for most of the day. I didn't follow what was happening on Twitter and was pretty much off line most of the day.

While I was away, the ANC had come calling. What was strange was that they had insisted the visit be filmed – as a sort of 'proof of life' that Madiba was 'well'. The ploy backfired – Madiba did not look well or happy with the visit.

Upon returning to Johannesburg in the evening I checked Twitter and noticed total outrage from the public over video material about Madiba that appeared on the news that night. I didn't know anything. I found it on YouTube and was disgusted by what I saw. Madiba was clearly not happy. There was total chaos in his lounge and because it was a visit by the President and senior members of the ANC, flash photography was allowed – something that every South African knew was prohibited because of the sensitivity of Madiba's eyes. In the footage Madiba appeared withdrawn because he was overwhelmed. It was clear to me from what I witnessed that there was no control. Even the medical staff responsible for his health, General Dabula and Surgeon General Ramlakan, were themselves taking photos rather than protecting Madiba's eyes and looking out for his well-being. I was disturbed. Was this what it all had come to? It was like a zoo and Madiba was the caged animal that the tourists all fawned over. He looked helpless. Mrs Machel was attending meetings at the Foundation, literally two minutes from the house, and she was not even informed of the visit.

They didn't tell me about the visit at the house, probably because they knew that I would not tolerate such drama. People detested me for keeping order and telling them what to do around Madiba and it

was clear why. If I wasn't there, this is what they did. A war broke out on Twitter and journalists asked where I was. I had to literally sit on my hands to stop myself from replying. The next day when I arrived at the Foundation the then CEO, Achmat Dangor, commented with disgust over the footage, and I said: 'Well this is what they all wanted, isn't it?' Isn't this why people argued so fiercely that Madiba no longer needed a secretary? If I had still been there, I wouldn't have allowed him to go in front of the media looking so weak and vulnerable. I wasn't the only one who was upset. The public and family were outraged with the ANC.

In the weeks to follow it got easier for me to see Madiba. The family eased their 'watch' over him and I could visit him more freely. I never knew on any day if that was going to be the last time I ever saw him.

* * *

On 8 June 2013 he was back in hospital and the Presidency announced that his condition was serious but stable. It was a recurring lung infection. We were filled with anxiety. We realized that it was on a knife's edge this time. Two days after his admittance I sneaked back into the hospital early one morning on the back seat of Josina's car. He was clearly very sick and weak but opened his eyes and managed a smile.

It was only then that I was told about events of the night of his admission. Someone, either medical or security personnel, decided to take him to hospital in an unmarked military medical vehicle to avoid suspicion from the public. My first question: 'Who in the public is watching him at 3 a.m. in the morning?' Halfway to the hospital in Pretoria the unmarked vehicle broke down. Forty minutes later help arrived. At first I thought this was a joke. How can Nelson Mandela, gravely sick, be stuck along a highway in the middle of winter for forty minutes at three in the morning? How is this possible? It was good that I had not been told earlier. I think it would have pushed me over the edge. I had been disabled in every possible way. Disarmed. I had no influence or power to question these matters any longer. And I felt I had neglected Madiba and Mrs Machel. My heart bled for them. How scared Madiba must have been! How scared Mrs Machel must have been, helpless, stressed! When I saw her she was clearly traumatized. How do things come to this? How does this happen to

Nelson Mandela, the world's most revered person alive? And the fact that he was still alive was clearly only a miracle.

Soon the media set up camp outside the hospital. Journalists were flying in from all over the world. Millions of dollars were spent on outside broadcast vans as people around the world watched with bated breath. However, inside, the fighter was slowly making his way back. Some people in public argued that it was time for us to 'let him go'. 'Stop praying for his recovery,' some said. What they had missed was that the hard-headed freedom fighter was going to decide for himself when enough was eventually enough. I worked twelve-plus hours per day responding to people from across the world and at home who wanted answers and confirmation of what the President had said – he was critical but stable. I simply confirmed exactly what the President had said and was vague in my responses but people were anxious. Josina and I had long conversations and we anchored one another. I was mindful that, if one didn't help to ease the anxiety, the anxiety would soon rub off on the family and eventually Madiba would feel it too.

During one of her visits to the hospital, Madiba's daughter Zindzi asked Josina whether I had been there. Zindzi explained by saying that she thought I should be given the opportunity to visit her father, upon which Josina said I had been there a few days before. Zindzi replied: 'Then I can rest.' I was very touched when I heard that. Someone other than the Machels was looking out for me and I was grateful. The day after my visit security at the hospital had been tightened. Josina and I laughed when I told her I had thought that the extra security was probably because I'd sneaked in on the back seat of her car. I then told her I had convinced myself that not everything was about me. Amid the anxiety these unbelievable things at least made us laugh. It was later reported in the news that the tightened security was to keep journalists out. I was happy it wasn't about me.

The last time I saw Madiba alive was on 11 July 2013, the night before I departed on my annual Bikers for Mandela Day ride across the country, doing my bit for Mandela Day. I entered the hospital with Malenga Machel, Mrs Machel's son. We used a back entrance so we would not be spotted by the media. Madiba was still very sick. I gave Malenga a chance to spend some time with Madiba and his mother alone, and they then called me in. Madiba could still open his eyes and show emotion but then drifted off quickly. I was shivering standing next to his bed, shocked to see him in the state that he was

in. I couldn't see his hands. I wanted to touch his hand but I couldn't find it. I was helpless, numb. Mrs Machel told him I was there but his eyes remained closed. She then nodded at me that it was OK to start speaking to him.

I knew I had to sound cheerful and not sad and said, 'Hello, Khulu. It's Zeldina. I am here to see you . . .' and there it was. He opened his eyes, followed by the biggest brightest smile and he looked at me and fixed his eyes upon me. 'How are you Khulu? You look well,' although he didn't. 'I miss you, Khulu,' I said and he kept on smiling. Mum and Malenga were making fun of me, joking that Madiba had not afforded others that smile but to me he did. Then he drifted off again and closed his eyes. I stood there for a few minutes and Mum and Malenga went to the side of the room and Mum said I could talk to him if I wanted to. I said what needed to be said, again. I composed myself and told him that I was leaving on my bike trip the following day, reminded him about his comment about my bike trip the first year back in 2010, when he'd said: 'Why did you do that?' and I responded: 'For you, Khulu.' I was on my way for him again. I was very sad that night to leave but the smile was all I needed to keep me going. I didn't expect that to be the last time I saw him.

Upon my return to Johannesburg after the bike trip I tried to go on a few occasions. But every time I asked Mum there was something that prevented me from going. I went back twice, seeing Mum on other business, but I couldn't see him.

* * *

On 15 June an article had appeared on the front page of the Saturday Star, repeated in the Afrikaans Sunday paper Rapport the following day. Shaun van Heerden, a trusted bodyguard and friend for more than ten years, had snapped. He had been suspended for a second time following allegations from the Surgeon General that he had leaked information to the media about Madiba's whereabouts when he was hospitalized. In the article he referred to the incident at the Soccer World Cup in 2010 and the Defence Force medical staff ruling our world with an iron fist. I felt very sorry for Shaun. He was the one that helped me to see Madiba whenever I was at the house and Mrs Machel wasn't there to get me through the red tape being placed by the family to keep me out. I didn't know how I would cope without Shaun.

A few days later the story about the ambulance that broke down as

Madiba was transported to hospital made world headlines after it leaked to the media. Newspapers described Mrs Machel as being 'frantic' during these events. The next day Makaziwe entered the hospital calling Mrs Machel 'Ms Frantic'. Mum was hurt and emotionally brutalized and Josina and I constantly tried to keep her strong by supporting her. Josina often went to support her mother whenever I couldn't. I missed Prof. He would have been there for us, he would have guided us, and his death left a void that is so difficult to explain.

In the week prior to Madiba's hospitalization I'd received word from a good friend who worked at the South African Breweries that they'd managed to track down our old family housekeeper, Jogabeth. She had been on my mind for years and on occasion I'd tried to find her but then abandoned the search when I hit a brick wall. But her husband was on a pension from the SAB and, just by my providing his name and a bit about his location back in the 1980s, they'd managed to find them for me. I immediately texted my mother and brother and we all called Jogabeth and Esau one night. We were overwhelmed with happiness to be reconnected. We planned to have a get-together but then Madiba fell ill and we had to postpone. My heart was filled with joy and my eyes filled with tears when Jogabeth said: 'All these years I have seen you on TV and thought "my Zellie has grown up" but how was I going to contact her again?' I was touched by her feeling of belonging. I hope to meet her soon, to reconnect and to see if there is anything I can do for them to help them in their old age. There was a time she gave up her life for me. It is time to return the favour.

And Madiba never ceased to amaze us. Even through the extended period of his illness he gave us and the world the time to prepare for a life without him. It took its toll on everyone. People were emotionally depleted. I would often dream about him at night. Sometimes good dreams and sometimes nightmares. I woke up every morning and realized with a shock that he was still ill. I would nervously reach for my cellphone to check if there had been any news or messages about him during the night. I was constantly worrying about him. During brief moments one continued with life as normal but then reality jerked me back to this state of limbo we were all in. I started feeling useless and worthless. My job was no longer a full-time occupation and time was treating me like a ship in the perfect storm at sea. Emotional ups and downs every day, frustrated and hurt by my

inability to see him or to reach out to him. My dreams became vivid and in the morning I had to convince myself that it was only a dream. They occurred more frequently as I prepared myself to take the final step away from him.

What worried me most and kept me awake was whether during this prolonged illness there was ever a moment when he was conscious enough to think: Why hasn't Zeldina been here? I cringe when I think about the fact that it may have crossed his mind that in the end I had perhaps left him as I promised I would never do. Did he think that I had neglected or abandoned him? And now, nineteen years later, I was longing to put my white hand on his dark skin; to touch the skin I was brought up to believe was not as good as mine. Yet it was that dark skin that gave my life significance. My entire being at the age of forty-three yearned to touch that hand once more, to feel the ripples around his knuckles, to see his smile lighting up the room when I say: 'Don't worry Khulu, I did not desert you.'

12

Om totsiens te sê

'n Paar maande nadat hy die eerste keer 'n lang tyd in die hospitaal deurgebring het, is daar besluit om Madiba na Qunu toe te verskuif. Hy het gereeld uitgevra oor mense saam met wie hy grootgeword het of oor mense in die familie wat reeds oorlede is. Qunu is 'n verafgeleë gebied in die Oos-Kaap en aangesien dit die plek is waar Madiba die vorige Desember siek geword het, was ons skepties oor hierdie besluit. Tuis in Johannesburg is hy naby mediese aandag, goeie vriende het van tyd tot tyd ingeloer en sommige familielede het hom soms besoek. 'n Mens kon iemand soos Ahmed Kathrada en George Bizos vra om 'n draai by hom te maak, maar in Qunu sou dit moeilik wees. Ons het nie geweet wat om in Qunu te verwag nie, maar die familie het daarop aangedring en daar was geen manier waarop mevrou Machel kon teëstribbel nie. Madiba was emosioneel stabiel waar sy ook al

was, in Qunu of in Johannesburg.

Danksy die ondersteuning van die stigting het ek elke week, of ten minste elke tweede week, Qunu toe begin reis. Madiba was nie meer so spraaksaam nie, maar hy wou die teenwoordigheid van ander om hom voel. Amper niemand het hom meer besoek nie en benewens die mediese en huishoudelike personeel was mevrou Machel die enigste een by hom. Omdat Qunu so afgeleë is, is dit moeilik om daarheen te reis. 'n Mens moet 'n hele dag opsy sit en vir 'n dagbesoek moet jy drieuur soggens opstaan en jy sou dan eers weer agtuur saans by die huis wees. Dit was seker nie maklik vir almal om soontoe te reis nie, maar Qunu het baie stil en afgesonderd geraak.

Daar is by die stigting aangekondig dat die organisasie geherstruktureer gaan word om meer op sy kernwerk te fokus. Ek het dit verstaan en die feit ondersteun dat die stigting 'n sentrum ter nagedagtenis aan Madiba moes wees, soortgelyk aan die presidensiële biblioteek om Madiba se nalatenskap te bewaar. Maar ek het nie saamgestem dat Madiba se kantoor toegemaak moes word nie. Terwyl Madiba geleef het, wou mense hul verbintenis met hom behou, al kon hy nie meer van sy kant af 'n bydrae lewer nie. Sy vriende en kennisse, almal mense wat verhoudings met hom gehad het, wou hê hul vennootskappe met hom moet erken word. As sy kantoor sou toemaak, sou dit nie meer moontlik wees nie. Maar daar is van ons verwag om die kantoor te sluit en gevestigde verhoudings oor te dra aan ander mense sonder die soort kennis en ervaring wat ons kantoor gehad het. Die gedagte was dat sy vriende as deel van die omskakeling beskou sou word, en ek het gevoel dit sou nie erkenning aan hul onderskeie persoonlike verhoudings gee nie.

Professor Gerwel en mevrou Machel het daarteen kapsie gemaak en gesê Madiba verdien 'n kantoor en 'n persoonlike assistent tot die dag van sy dood. Professor Gerwel, wat ook voorsitter van die stigting was, het gesê Madiba het my met die hand uitgekies en dat hy weier om my oortollig te verklaar, aangesien Madiba die keuse gemaak het toe hy in 'n posisie was om te besluit wie hy om hom wou hê. Madiba se kantoor is toegemaak en ons is almal van ons pligte onthef, maar ek is weer op 'n deeltydse grondslag aangestel. Ek is egter tot 'n groot mate ondermyn en kantlyn toe geskuif. Voortaan was my pos eintlik net seremonieel van aard. Maretha en Thoko, die ander twee

personeellede wat net so lank vir Madiba gewerk het, is afgedank. Ek is gelukkig nooit deur geld gedryf nie en ek is in my lewe beloon met iets wat geld nooit kan koop nie, en ek het besluit ek sal toegewyd bly aan Madiba en mevrou Machel, al word ek niks betaal nie. Lojaliteit en toewyding kan nie gekoop word of betaal word om te verdwyn nie. Ek het myself en vir Madiba ook belowe dat ek hom nooit sal verlaat of versaak nie tot die heel laaste dag.

Teen die begin van 2012 het Madiba permanent in Qunu gebly. Ek sou elke week vir 'n dag of twee soontoe reis om tyd saam met hom deur te bring. Op 28 Februarie 2012 het ek my laaste dag as 'n voltydse werknemer van Nelson Mandela gewerk. Ek het nie verwag dat die volgende dag juis anders sou wees nie, maar dit was. Ek het skielik leeg en doelloos gevoel. Ek het geweet Madiba sou dit nie toegelaat het nie, maar hy het nie meer besluite geneem nie en was ook nie in staat om sy wense uit te spreek nie. Om die waarheid te sê, dit het gelyk of hy stadig besig was om van ons weg te beweeg. Hy was duidelik oud, iemand moes permanent na hom omsien en hy was nie meer die vrolike mens wat ons geken het nie.

Die stigting se uitvoerende hoof het my laat weet my posbeskrywing het verander van uitvoerende persoonlike assistent na persoonlike assistent. In agttien jaar was ek eers tikster, toe assistent-private sekretaresse en toe private sekretaresse, en daarna bestuurder van sy kantoor en sy woordvoerder en nou weer terug na persoonlike assistent. Dit was eintlik lagwekkend dat liefde, sorgsaamheid, lojaliteit en vertroue 'n mens op so 'n onvoorspelbare pretparkrit kon neem.

Ek het nooit ambisie gehad om enigiets anders te bereik nie. Ek wou net so goed as wat ek kon aan sy behoeftes voldoen en hierdie jongste poging om my opsy te skuif het my nie van stryk gebring nie. Jy sien, as Nelson Mandela in 'n mens glo en jou met die hand kies en verdedig tot hy nie meer kan nie, ondanks al die kritiek van die party wat hom gevorm het, behoort niks in die lewe jou aandag af te trek nie. Ek het nog nooit hierdie dinge gebruik om myself te verdedig nie, maar ek het toegelaat dat dinge gebeur soos wat dit moes gebeur het. Ek het nooit verwys na die feit dat Madiba my met die hand uitgekies het nie, aangesien ek van mening is dat dit as verwaandheid beskou kon word. Maar ek het altyd geglo daar sou 'n tyd kom wanneer ek

myself sou moes verdedig en dat ek daardie dag rasioneel oor dinge sou dink.

Ek glo een van die minder aantreklike karaktereienskappe van sommige van ons Afrikaners is dat ons grootgemaak is om te glo ons verdien niks, ons is niks en ons kan niks bereik nie. Wel, diegene wat wel iets bereik het, het dit so sprankelend gedoen en daarin geslaag om hulleself ver bo hierdie verbeelde beperkings op te hef. Ek moes hard werk om die feit te aanvaar dat ek deur Madiba gekies is om enigiets te doen. Die positiewe kant van die saak is dat ’n mens nooit nadink oor hierdie dinge nie, wat waarskynlik keer dat jy selfbehep word. Ek is die eerste een wat sal erken dat ek niks is en niks was nie, behalwe dit waarmee Madiba my lewe geseën en gevul het.

Die gif in die familie het oral uitgelek. Baie van sy familielede wou my nooit in die omtrek gehad het nie, en nou het hulle hul kans gekry. Maar ek het steeds geweier om hom te versaak. Hulle wou nie gehad het ek moet elke week Qunu toe vlieg om hom te sien nie en ek het gehoor hoe vra hulle ons uitvoerende hoof: ‘Wat gaan maak sy daar?’ Selfs al sou ek ’n borg moes vind wat my elke week Qunu toe laat vlieg sodat ek hom kan sien, was ek bereid om dit ook te soek. Net mevrou Machel was daar saam met die huishoudelike en mediese personeel. Madiba was eensaam. President Zuma het af en toe ’n draai gemaak, en so ook ’n paar van Madiba se beste vriende wat die moeite gedoen het om die vermoeiende reis na Qunu aan te pak, maar hy het al hoe meer geïsoleerd geword van die res van die wêreld. Wanneer ’n belangrike persoon hom besoek het, sou daar skielik ’n hele klomp mense wees wat belangstelling toon. En van tyd tot tyd is mense soos Ahmed Kathrada en ander ou vriende gevra om vir die dag te kom kuier en ’n mens kon sien hoe gelukkig sulke besoeke hom gemaak het.

Madiba het altyd bly gelyk om my te sien. Ons het nie veel gepraat nie, maar wanneer mevrou Machel by was, het hy dit geniet om te kyk hoe ons sit en gesels en stories uitruil. Hy het lewe om hom nodig gehad. Hy het mense nodig gehad wat hom kon aanraak, na hom kon omsien en ’n sin van normaliteit om hom kon skep sodat hy nie gevoel het hy bly agter nie. Sommige dae sou ons gesprekke net uit die volgende bestaan: ‘O, Zeldina, jy is hier. Hoe gaan dit met jou ouers?’

En ek sou hom terg en vra: ‘Khulu, gaan u nie vra hoe gaan dit met

my nie?' En sy skouers sou begin ruk soos hy lag. Hy sou insluimer en wakker word en sy hand uitsteek om aan myne te vat. Hy het dit met die meeste besoekers gedoen.

Die huis in Qunu moes opgeknap word en Madiba was vir 'n rukkie terug in Johannesburg. Die weke het vinnig verbygegaan en dit was makliker om hom gereeld te besoek. Op 'n spesifieke Vrydagmiddag het ek en mevrou Machel gepraat oor die seun van koningin Beatrix van Nederland wat in 'n ernstige ski-ongeluk betrokke was. Mevrou Machel het probeer om die Nederlandse koningsgesin in die hande te kry om ons steun oor te dra. Ons was na aan hulle en ek het om dié rede persoonlik deur die nuus geraak gevoel.

Daardie Vrydagnag is ek bed toe en ek het aan die familie se lyding gedink. Ek het my foon se klank soms afgeskakel wanneer ek bed toe gaan, en die volgende oggend het ek 'n bietjie later geslaap as gewoonlik. Toe ek wakker word en die foon optel, het ek gesien iets is verkeerd. Ek het sewe oproepe gemis en sestien teksboodskappe. Ons het nie meer gewerk nie en daar was onder normale omstandighede geen rede vir soveel kommunikasie nie. Die eerste boodskap wat ek oopgemaak het, was van Robyn Curnow, 'n joernalisvriendin: 'Madiba is in die hospitaal.' Ek het geantwoord: 'Wat? Is jy ernstig? Hoe weet jy?' Sy het toe vir my gesê dat dit oral in die nuus was. Ek het die storie nagespoor en ontdek dat hy inderdaad in die hospitaal was. Ek het niks geweet nie. Niemand het my iets vertel nie. Ek het Josina gebel en sy het dit aan my bevestig. Sy het ook geen besonderhede gehad nie. Ek het toe vir mevrou Machel 'n teksboodskap gestuur en gevra of alles in die haak was. Ek het vir haar gesê ek wil geen besonderhede hoor van waar hy was nie, maar sy moes net vir my sê of alles in die haak is, aangesien ek nie die skuld wou dra indien die storie sou uitlek nie. Sy het my 'n vinnige oorsig van die gebeure gegee.

Ek weet nie van enige lewende mens wat so oneerbiedig behandel is soos mevrou Machel nie. Die politiekery in die familie oor Madiba se begrafnis het jare voor sy dood begin. So vroeg as April 2005 het die eerste artikel oor begrafnisplanne en 'n spesiale komitee wat dit behartig reeds in *Noseweek* verskyn. Mevrou Machel en party van die kinders het geweier om mee te doen aan die reëlings vir Madiba se begrafnis. Hy was nog redelik gesond en dit was ondenkbaar om

iemand se begrafnis te beplan terwyl die persoon nog gelukkig voortleef en terwyl sy vrou na hom omsien. Eers heelwat later, toe die minister van verdediging, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, mevrou Machel uit meegevoel betrek het, is sy oor sekere dinge geraadpleeg en ingelig oor die beplanning. Ek weet net mevrou Machel moes baklei om my naam op die begrafnislys te kry. Ek het egter ’n belofte aan hóm gemaak. Ek sou daar wees tot op die einde, selfs as dit moes beteken dat ek langs ’n heining buite sy plaas op Qunu moes staan terwyl hulle hom ter ruste lê. Min het ek geweet hoe naby dit aan die waarheid sou wees.

Dit was waar wat Madiba soms gesê het: ‘As jy ’n man se karakter wil toets, gee hom mag. Wanneer mense mag het, sal hulle wys wie hulle regtig is.’

Elke keer wanneer Madiba in die hospitaal opgeneem is, het ons asem opgehou. Ek het teen dié tyd geweet ek moet myself afsny wanneer hy hospitaal toe gaan. In hierdie tye het ek ’n kluisenaar geword en met niemand gepraat nie en ook nie my foon beantwoord nie; ek het nie eens met my ouers gepraat nie. Die enigste mense met wie ek gepraat het, was professor Gerwel, mevrou Machel en Josina. Ek het besef as ek ooit vertroue verbreek of inligting laat uitlek, sou ek eenvoudig vir die res van Madiba se lewe toegang tot hom geweier word. Dit sou die familie rede gee om van my ontslae te raak. Ek was nie van plan om aan hulle daardie plesier te verskaf nie en ek het my afstand gehou en op mevrou Machel vir nuusbrokkies gesteun. Ek het ook oor haar begin bekommerd raak. Sy het ’n swaar las gedra. En soos altyd was die familie verdeeld terwyl sy haar doodbekommer het oor Madiba se welstand.

Die druk by die werk het uiteindelik afgeneem. Behalwe vir ’n paar lede van die publiek wat nie kon verstaan dat Madiba nie meer aktief betrokke sou wees nie, het die korrespondensie en versoeke minder geword. Daar was altyd een voorstel of versoek wat iemand gedink het die uitsondering op die reël moes wees en mense het sonder enige logika geglo Nelson Mandela was die enigste mens wat hul planne sou ondersteun of ten minste sy naam daaraan sou verbind. Ek het oor die jare besef as ’n mens aanhoudend negatiewe goed in jou werk doen, soos om vir almal nee te sê, was dit onafwendbaar dat dit ’n negatiewe invloed op jou psige sou hê. Jy neig om sinies te word en

dit vat aanhoudende pogings om jouself van daardie negatiewe denke weg te trek. Met minder versoeke en die negatiwiteit wat daarmee saamkom, is dit makliker om balans in jou lewe te vind. Ek het myself oopgestel vir ’n nuwe fase in my lewe.

Mense vra my gereeld of ek nie spyt is dat ek nooit getrou het of kinders gehad het nie. Dit sal selfsugtig en buitengewoon ondankbaar wees om die woord ‘spyt’ te gebruik wanneer ek my eie lewe beskryf. Ek het soveel gebaat deur Madiba te dien, maar ek aanvaar dat ek my jeug opgeoffer het en miskien selfs my toekoms vir hom gegee het. Maar ek sal hom nooit die skuld daarvoor gee nie, want uiteindelik is dit ek wat die keuse gemaak het. Was dit ’n opoffering of nie? Ek voel nie belas of hartseer omdat ek dalk geleenthede misgeloop het nie. Ek het so baie gebaat. Ek is geheel en al tevrede met die lewe wat ek het.

My deeltyds-status en verminderde inkomste by die stigting het beteken dat ek bykomende inkomste moes skep en ’n uitdaging moes vind. Ek het nog steeds beperkte verantwoordelikhede teenoor Madiba gehad en ek was vasbeslote dat ek nie ’n ander voltydse pos sou aanvaar tensy dit finansieel onafwendbaar was nie. Ek was vasbeslote dat ek beskikbaar vir Madiba en mevrou Machel sou bly wanneer hulle my ook al nodig sou hê en ek moes myself nuttig maak, maar dit was onmoontlik en onlogies om te dink dat jy ’n ander deeltydse pos sou vind en steeds beskikbaar sal wees aan iemand wanneer hulle jou ook al nodig het.

Dis die vreemdste ervaring. Waar ek agttien jaar lank sonder ophou op adrenalien geleef het, moes ek die kraantjie nou toedraai, oornag, en dit was nie ’n grap nie. ’n Mens moet ’n rede vir jou bestaan vind. Dit was moeilik. Sekere faksies in die familie wou my steeds uit hê. Op die eerste dag van die ‘res van my lewe’, 1 Maart 2012, het ek ’n tatoeëermerk om my linkerpols laat aanbring om my te herinner aan wat ek omtrent myself ontdek het op hierdie reis: ‘Jaag jou passie na.’ Solank as wat ek dit doen, weet ek ek sal die res van my lewe gelukkig wees. My passie is om te dien en ek vind vervulling daarin. Ek het die woorde in Frans laat aanbring omdat ek myself ook vir die res van my lewe wou herinner aan iets wat Madiba gesê het: ‘Vind jou wortels.’ En aangesien my familie van Franse afkoms is, wou ek die woorde in Frans hê.

Die eerste paar maande van my nuwe lewe was moeilik. Ek het nog steeds nou en dan kantoor toe gegaan om administrasiewerk te doen en dan soms vir Madiba gaan sien. Daar is ’n aankondiging gemaak dat hy na Qunu sou terugkeer sodra die huis daar klaar opgeknap was. Dus was ek spoedig terug in my roetine om elke week of elke tweede week Qunu toe te vlieg. Soms was Madiba lus vir gesels en soms was hy nie. Soms sou ek en mevrou Machel die hele dag lank gesels en debat voer oor wat ook al in die wêreld en Suid-Afrika aangaan; oor die politiek en die ANC en wêreldgebeure soos die Arabiese Lente en verwikkelings in ander Afrikalande, en nou en dan sou Madiba net goedkeurend glimlag oor die lewe om hom. Ons sou rustig in die kamer sit en gesels en dan sou hy skielik vir my sê my handsak is op die vloer en ek moet dit optel. Hy was altyd daar en altyd bewus van wat om hom aangaan. Partymaal sou ek vir professor Gerwel bel sodat Madiba vir hom hallo kon sê. Madiba se gesig het altyd opgehelder as hy Prof se stem gehoor het. ‘O, Jakes,’ sou hy dan sê, ‘dis vir my lekker om met jou te gesels.’ Terwyl ons by hom gesit het, het hy gereeld ingesluimer in sy gunstelingstoel, maar dan sou hy skielik wakker word en kyk of ons nog daar is. En wanneer ’n mens dink jou voorregte kom tot ’n einde, is daar nóg. Ek het die waardevolste en kosbaarste tye daar saam met hulle deurgebring.

Wanneer Mum nie daar was nie, sou hy keer op keer vra: ‘Waar is Mum? Wanneer kom sy terug?’ En dan moes jy die dag van die week vir hom noem en presies wanneer sy terug sou wees. Mevrou Machel sou soms op pad Johannesburg toe wees vir die dag en ek sou Qunu besoek en ons het in die lug by mekaar verbygevlieg. Aan die einde van die dag het dit gevoel asof Madiba al tweehonderd keer gevra het: ‘Waar is Mum?’ Hy was geheel en al afhanklik van haar teenwoordigheid en lusteloos wanneer sy nie by was nie.

Mense was besig en min van hulle het kom kuier. Dit was regtig groot moeite om daar uit te kom en dan was daar nog die feit dat Madiba nie elke dag lus was om mense te sien nie, wat dit moeilik gemaak het om selfs sy beste vriende vir sosiale besoeke oor te nooi. Ons het opgehou om besoeke te beplan vir mense wat hy nie baie goed geken het nie. Ons het natuurlik later agtergekom wanneer ons nie daar was nie, het van die familie soms die geleentheid gebruik om vreemdelinge soontoe te neem. Wanneer foto’s of berigte van sulke

besoeke in die media verskyn het, sou die stigting Madiba weer moes beskerm. Mense sou sê: 'As so en so hom kon gaan sien, hoekom nie ek nie?' En die stryd het van voor af begin wanneer ons hulle diplomaties probeer vertel dat ons dit nie goedgekeur het nie en dat ons instruksies ontvang het dat besoekers nie meer by hom toegelaat sou word nie. By sommige geleenthede het die stigting 'n spesifieke besoek van die hand gewys om iets te laat teken of te onderskryf of selfs om sekere mense te sien, en dan sou ons later verneem dat iemand in die familie die versoek toegestaan het en toegelaat het dat sekere dinge gebeur terwyl ek en mevrou Machel nie daar was nie. Party mense het begin om hieruit voordeel te trek die oomblik toe hulle sien Madiba het nie meer die vermoë om te stry of by sy vorige besluite te bly nie. Sommige sakemense wat ons situasie goed geken het, het ons soms gebel oor vreemde versoeke wat hulle van Madiba ontvang het.

Madiba het nie regtig meer baie gekommunikeer nie, dus was dit soms ongemaklik om mense na hom toe te neem wat hom nie geken het nie. Daar sou ongemaklike stiltes tydens hierdie besoeke wees.

Teen dié tyd het ek weggetrek uit die buurt in Johannesburg waarvoor ek so lief was omdat ek dit eenvoudig nie meer kon bekostig om daar te woon nie. Ek het nou aan die buitewyke van die stad gebly, wat die daaglikse pendel in en uit die stad 'n uitdaging gemaak het. Ek was nie verbind tot kantoorure nie en ek moes 'n oog op my geldsake hou. Ek het begin om my vriende en die bande wat ek met mense van my buurt gedeel het te mis en ek moes keer of ek raak depressief. Ek het gevoel die stigting skuif my opsy en ek was ver van my vriende. Ek het besef dat ek nie deur die jare vir myself 'n vaste ondersteuningstelsel opgebou het nie. Oor die algemeen het mense net met hulle lewe voortgegaan en ek moes sukkel om weer my voete te vind en myself reg te ruk. Die moed het my ook begewe om my vrese met baie van my vriende te deel, waarskynlik ook omdat ek geweet het hulle sien my as 'n sterk mens en ek moes daardie beeld behou. Ek het die politiek gemis en ook die feit dat ek inligting uit die binnekringe gehad het oor dinge wat in ons land gebeur.

Professor Gerwel het baie maande lank nie tyd saam met Madiba deurgebring of hom gesien nie en ons het besluit dat hy 'n spesiale reis sou onderneem om Madiba te besoek. In Augustus 2012 het ek en hy

op ’n datum ooreengekom en ek het hom in Oos-Londen ontmoet, van waar ek die tweehonderd-en-sestig kilometer na Qunu bestuur het. Ons het ’n baie spesiale dag gehad en Madiba en Prof het mekaar se geselskap geniet. Hulle het ’n paar keer lekker gelag en toe ek daardie middag vertrek om Prof terug Oos-Londen toe te neem, het ek gedink dat dit werklik ’n buitengewoon genotvolle dag vir Madiba was.

Ek was lief vir Prof, maar ek dink Madiba was selfs liewer vir hom. Mevrou Machel het ook selde vir Prof gesien en het dit geniet om tyd saam met hom deur te bring. Ons het vertrek en ooreengekom dat Prof sou begin om oor Madiba se presidentskap te skryf. Ek en Prof het teruggery Oos-Londen toe en gelag oor die jare in die presidensie, die baie dinge wat daar gebeur het, ook die stresvolle tye. Oor een ding het ons saamgestem: As ons destyds geweet het wat vir ons voorlê, sou ons waarskynlik ander keuses gemaak het voor ons so emosioneel aan Madiba verbind geraak het. Die drie uur terug Oos-Londen toe het ons ook op ’n gedagtereis van agttien jaar geneem en toe ons by die lughawe groet, het ek geweet Prof is gelukkig en bly oor die dag wat hy saam met Madiba deurgebring het. Hy het ’n teksboodskap gestuur toe hy by die huis kom waarin hy my bedank het omdat ek daarop aangedring het dat hy tyd inruim om saam met Madiba deur te bring. Hy was aan soveel fronte besig, het in tallose direksies gedien en was by soveel dinge betrokke, maar ek was bly dat ek hom kon oorreed om ’n dag af te vat en so ver te reis om Madiba te sien.

Toe ek ’n paar maande later die nuus van Prof se dood ontvang, was ek in my bed in Mthatha se Holiday Inn, omtrent veertig kilometer van Qunu. Toe Mum vir Madiba van Prof se afsterwe vertel, was daar hartseer en verlies in sy oë en hy het ’n hele paar ure lank heeltemal stil geraak. Dis moeilik om te sê hoe iemand van sy ouderdom op daardie soort nuus sou reageer en mevrou Machel moes seker maak haar tydsberekening was foutloos om die pyn van die skok te verdoof. Sy was veronderstel om vir die dag Johannesburg toe te reis, maar het haar planne afgestel om by Madiba te wees omdat sy nie geweet het hoe hy die skok en hartseer sou verwerk nie.

Dis moeilik om ’n waarde te heg aan die rol wat professor Gerwel die voorafgaande agttien jaar in ons lewe gespeel het. Vat wat jy ook al glo iemand kan vir jou beteken en maal dit met honderd. Dis min of meer hoe dit is. Prof het die mees onkonvensionele manier gehad om

dinge te hanteer. Soos wat Koos Bekker, uitvoerende hoof van Naspers, by die begrafnisdiens gesê het: Ons almal sou met ’n spesifieke saak worstel en dan sou Prof die een wees wat met die mees gebalanseerde oplossing vorendag kom, wat almal laat voel het hulle is wenners, selfs as moes hulle kompromieë aangaan. Hy het ’n sterk persoonlikheid gehad en maklik respek by mense ingeboesem. Hy sou dinge van ’n afstand in stilte dophou en dan een verklaring maak om die saak in ’n splinternuwe rigting te stuur en jou sodoende help om met jou eie oplossings vorendag te kom. Hy het na elke woord geluister wat ek ooit vir hom gesê het, maak nie saak hoe netelig die kwessie was of hoeveel ek gekla het nie, en wanneer ek verkeerd was, sou hy die een mens wees wat eerlik en openlik, maar met respek, dit aan my sou uitwys.

Tydens Madiba se presidentskap het Prof gereeld saam met ons gereis en hy was baie betrokke by ons alledaagse lewens. Na sy uittrede uit die regering het daardie betrokkenheid verminder, maar hy was altyd net een foonoproep weg. Ek kon hom van enige plek in die wêreld bel om raad oor enigiets te vra. En hy sou die eerste persoon wees wat ek sou kontak oor ’n belangrike voorval of iets regtig dom of snaaks wat gebeur het. Ons het geskinder en grappe gemaak maar dan, wanneer dit by ernstige sake kom, was hy ’n leidende vaderfiguur vir my. Hy was lief vir Afrikaans en ons sou baie oop, eerlike gesprekke voer en grappe maak en skerp Afrikaanse uitdrukkings gebruik wat ons al twee sou laat lag. Hy was ’n mens wat by enigiemand in enige situasie kon aansluit en hy kon enige rol perfek vertolk. Hy sou ’n gesprek in ’n rigting lei wanneer hy met ’n oorsese staatshoof praat, en die volgende oomblik met die mees junior lid van die personeel gesels en hom of haar laat voel asof hul interaksie meer genotvol was as dié van die belangriker mense.

Op die dag van Prof se gedenkdiens is hoofregter Arthur Chaskalson ook oorlede. Madiba het hom as hoof van die konstitusionele hof van Suid-Afrika aangestel, die mees senior regspos in die land. Maar net voor die gedenkdiens begin het, het ek ’n boodskap van die regter se seun ontvang om vir my te sê sy pa is oorlede. Een van ons gunstelingministers, Trevor Manuel, het die verrigtinge gelei tydens Prof se gedenkdiens en ek het hom van die regter se dood vertel. Voordat die verrigtinge begin het, het ons ook ’n minuut se stilte vir

regter Chaskalson gehandhaaf. Twee sleutelfigure in ons lewe is in een week oorlede. Dit was te veel om te hanteer. My hart was gebreek. Die een persoon wat ek verwag het tot op die einde aan ons sy sou wees, was Prof. Ek was ook op 'n manier kwaad omdat hy nie by sou wees die dag wanneer ons Madiba sou moes begrawe nie. Maar so is die lewe. Wanneer Madiba ooit oor sterflikheid gepraat het, of as mense oor syne gepraat het, het ek besef enigeen van ons kon voor hom gaan. En Prof wat ons verlaat het, was bewys daarvan.

'n Paar maande vroeër het die veiligheidspersoneel wat saam met Madiba, mevrou Machel en die huispersoneel was, twee nuwe lede opgemerk tussen die mediese span wat na Madiba moes omsien. Mum, die veiligheidspersoneel en sommige van die huishoudelike personeel het gewonder of hulle moontlik intelligensie-agente kon wees. Die lede van die permanente mediese span wat Madiba opgepas het, het hulle ook nie geken nie. Ek het 'n boodskap aan president Zuma se kantoor gestuur om te vra of hulle bewus is van hierdie reëlings. Ek het 'n antwoord ontvang dat hulle die saak sou ondersoek en na my toe sou terugkom. Ek het niks gehoor nie. Toe stuur ek 'n volgende boodskap en hierdie keer het ek bygevoeg dat die situasie die potensiaal het om 'n groot verleentheid vir die regering te skep, aangesien dit duidelik inbreuk maak op Madiba en sy familie se privaatheid en waardigheid.

Ek het dadelik 'n antwoord ontvang dat die saak by die minister van staatsveiligheid aangemeld is en dat ek spoedig 'n antwoord van hom kon verwag. En dit was ook so. Minister Siyabonga Cwele het minute later gebel om te vra oor die situasie en weer omtrent 'n uur later, net om vir my te sê die mense is nie deel van die Nasionale Intelligensie-agentskap nie, maar dat hy die saak met die geneesheer-generaal sou bespreek om vas te stel of die militêre owerhede hul teenwoordigheid goedkeur. Ek het aan die minister herhaal wat ek in die teksboodskap aan die presidensie geskryf het. Ek het nooit weer van die minister gehoor nie, maar drie weke later het die twee karakters verdwyn – net om 'n paar weke later weer hul verskyning te maak ten spyte van die hangende navraag. Ons kon nie uitmaak wat presies hul sending was nie. Ek was gewalg deur die manier waarop staatshulpbronne klaarblyklik gebruik is. Min ander dinge het my so kwaad gemaak. Invloedrykheid het tot gevolg gehad dat mense staatshulpbronne vir

hul eie doelwitte ingespan het. Ons het 'n ongelooflike probleem met korrupsie in die regering en dis dalk die grootste bedreiging vir ons demokrasie. Hierdie was 'n duidelike voorbeeld van die korrupte regering wat dié soort inmenging in sy sake toelaat.

Kgalema Motlanthe was destyds ons adjunkpresident. Sy verhouding met Madiba strek baie jare terug in die ANC. Madiba het van Kgalema gehou en het hom 'n hele ruk lank nie gesien nie. Daar is gereël dat hy Qunu op Vrydag 7 Desember sou besoek. Op die Donderdag het ek van Kgalema se besoek gehoor. Ek was bly daaroor maar glad nie van plan om weer daardie week op 'n vliegtuig te klim om daar te wees tydens die besoek nie. En toe het Kgalema se kantoor skielik gebel om te sê die besoek is van ons kant af gekanselleer. Meme, die huishoudster, het vir my gesê Madiba het nie 'n goeie dag gehad nie en om wilde bespiegeling te verhinder, het sy die adjunkpresident se kantoor gevra om die besoek te kanselleer. Maar nou wou die adjunkpresident van my weet wat die rede hiervoor was. Die ANC se nasionale konferensie sou 'n week later begin. Ons almal het ons vermoedens gehad oor politieke inmenging by die afstel van die besoek. Ek het teruggebel en gesê dis regtig net omdat Madiba nie lekker voel nie. Dit was 'n moeilike situasie, maar teen dié tyd was ons gewoond daaraan dat Madiba party dae net nie mense wou sien nie en net in die bed wou bly. Ek het aanvaar dit was maar net een van daardie dae.

Op Saterdag 8 Desember was ek in 'n radio-ateljee toe Achmat Dangor bel. Teen dié tyd het ek ingestem om Saterdae saam met twee ander persoonlikhede 'n leefstylprogram op 'n plaaslike radiostasie aan te bied. Ek kon nie die oproep neem nie en het hom so gou moontlik teruggebel aan die einde van die program. Hy het gesê daar was bespiegeling oor Madiba se gesondheid en dat die Sondagkoerante probeer het om 'n rede te vind hoekom Kgalema se besoek afgestel is. Ek het Meme gebel en sy het my verseker dat daar niks met Madiba skort nie. Ek kon hom in die agtergrond hoor praat terwyl ek op die foon was en ek het Achmat gebel om dit vir hom te sê. Die foon het nie opgehou lui nie.

Twee uur later was dit op die nuus dat Madiba vir 'n roetine-ondersoek in die hospitaal in Pretoria opgeneem is. En weer was my reaksie: 'Wat?' Ek het vir mevrou Machel 'n teksboodskap gestuur:

'Mum, is alles in die haak daar? Ek verneem Madiba is in die hospitaal.' Sy het nie dadelik gelees of geantwoord nie. Ons het vermoed ons fone en gesprekke word gemonitor. Indien daar in Suid-Afrika vermoed word dat jy die stabiliteit van die land bedreig, of as jy van terrorisme verdink word, mag daar op jou foon ingeluister word. Ons het nie een van die twee gedoen nie, maar het gewonder of die regeringsamptenare, wat die mediese personeel insluit, aangesê is om alles wat mevrou Machel doen aan hulle te rapporteer. Ek het later 'n oproep van Meme ontvang en sy het verduidelik dat die mediese personeel vir haar gesê het om vir niemand te vertel wat gebeur nie, maar dat Madiba inderdaad hospitaal toe geneem is. Ek kon dit nie verstaan nie. Waarom moes hulle hom so oorhaastig en geheimsinnig by die hospitaal kry?

Ons het weer ons asem opgehou. Dit was net ongelooflik. Ek was nie bygelowig nie, maar ek kon nie help om te wonder of Prof dalk eerste gegaan het om die pad vir Madiba voor te berei nie en my gedagtes het my bang gemaak. Spoedig sou mevrou Machel vir my sê wat aangaan en ek kon hoor sy was onder groot druk. Sy was gestres, sy was bekommerd en sy was besorgd. Dit was duidelik dat ek sou moes wag vir die storm om oor te waai voor ek weer probeer om Madiba te sien. Uiteindelik het ek en Josina 'n paar dae later vir hom gaan kuier. Ek was angstig en wou nie dieselfde fout maak wat ek met Prof gemaak het nie. Teen die tyd dat ek Prof voor sy dood in die hospitaal in Kaapstad besoek het, was hy reeds in 'n koma en ek wou nie hê dit moet weer gebeur nie. Madiba het my herken en ons het 'n kortstondige interaksie gehad wat my gekalmeer het. Ek wou net gehad het hy moet vir my sê 'O, Zeldina' en alles sou in die haak wees. Soos almal in die wêreld wou ek net hoor dit gaan goed met hom. Ons het 'n tydjie saam met Mum deurgebring en toe is ons daar weg.

Die publiek was angstig oor die gebeure en die regering het geen gereelde verklarings uitgereik om hulle op hoogte van Madiba se vordering te hou nie. Teen dié tyd het ons verneem dat die regering alle kommunikasie oor sy welstand sou hanteer en ek het geen begeerte of wens gehad om by hierdie taak in te meng nie. Ek het al te goed geweet hoe moeilik dit was om dinge wat Madiba betref te hanteer, iets waarvoor baie min mense my krediet wou gee, en nou is dit hulle beurt en ek was bly daaroor terwyl ek met my eie emosies

moes worstel.

Madiba se siekte het my baie ontstel en soos met enige vier-en-negentigjarige het sy toestand elke dag verander. Een dag was dit goed en die volgende dag was dit nie so goed nie. Ek het opgepak en vir die vakansie na my ouers vertrek. Ek kon dit nie meer verduur nie en ek was nie in staat om hom te besoek nie.

Terwyl ek met vakansie was, het mevrou Machel vir my ’n boodskap gestuur dat dit beter gaan met Madiba en dat hy een van die wit verpleegsters begin Zeldina noem het en dat sy gedink het hy verlang na my. Daar was niks wat ek hieraan kon doen nie. So graag as wat ek daar wou wees, moes ek ook vir Kersfees by my ouers wees. Ek kon Madiba nie meer gereeld sien of sommer net ’n draai maak nie en in stilte het ek gehoop dat hy nie sou dink ek verwaarloos hom nie. My ouers was ook besig om oud te word en ek het begin besef dat hulle ook nie vir altyd by my sou wees nie. Ek het hulle baie jare lank afgeskeep as gevolg van my werk, meer as sewe jaar nie Kersfees saam met hulle deurgebring nie omdat ek besig was om die kinders se Kerspartytjie in Qunu te reël, en dit was tyd om sake reg te stel en tyd saam met hulle deur te bring.

Met my terugkeer na my Kersbesoek aan my ouers aan die kus is Madiba uit die hospitaal ontslaan en was hy besig om sy voete by die huis te vind. Ek het my verminderde verpligtinge by die stigting hervat en so besig as moontlik probeer bly. Soms was ek regtig neerslagtig en dan het ek heeldag in die bed gebly. Dit was ongesond. So graag as wat ek Madiba wou sien, was ek bewus van die feit dat sekere personeellede Makaziwe gebel of vir haar teksboodskappe gestuur het om te laat weet wanneer ek daar is. Ek het gewag dat hulle vir my sê ek is nie welkom nie.

Dit was tyd vir die bekendstelling van die dokumentêre rolprent *Miracle Rising* in Londen. Dit is ’n kragtige verhaal oor Suid-Afrika se oorgang na demokrasie tussen 1990 en 1994. Hoewel die mense in onderhoude uitgevra is oor Madiba se rol in hierdie tydvak, was die fokus meestal op Cyril Ramaphosa en Roelf Meyer, wat die onderhandelings vir ’n vreedsame skikking tussen die ANC en die Nasionale Party by die Konvensie vir ’n Demokratiese Suid-Afrika (Kodesa) gelei het. Die produksiemaatskappy het my einde Januarie as lid van die produksiespan Londen toe gevlieg vir die vertoning. Ek het

in daardie stadium lanklaas oorsee gereis en ek was opgewonde oor die geleentheid. Die fliek is goed ontvang en toe ek dit sien, was ek trots op my bydrae. Ek het dit geniet om mense te sien met wie ek kontak verloor het en met wie ek nie meer saamgewerk het nadat ons opgehou reis het nie. Van die beroemdes wat in die fliek hul menings gee, het nie ’n vreeslike indruk op my gemaak nie, maar ek het verstaan die produk was op die breë publiek gemik en groot name en rolprentsterre was die lokaas. Ek het gehou van die feit dat ek op dié manier tot die geskiedenis bygedra het, aangesien ek begrip gehad het vir die probleme waardeur ons tuis op politieke vlak in die gesig gestaar is. Die fliek is ook in Suid-Afrika vertoon en is goed ontvang.

Op 14 Februarie 2013 het die Paralimpiese atleet Oscar Pistorius sy meisie, die model Reeva Steenkamp, doodgeskiet en beweer hy het haar vir ’n indringer aangesien. Die hele land was geskok. Een van ons helde het geval en met hom saam ons hoop en alles wat die nuwe Suid-Afrika beteken het. Die wonderwerk het gestruikel. Ek weet nie hoekom dit so belangrik was nie, maar almal het daardie Valentynsdag ’n groot verlies aangevoel. Mense, veral Suid-Afrikaners, wil altyd ’n held hê. Madiba was elke mens se held en Oscar ook, omdat hy sy gebrek oorkom het en Suid-Afrika se naam hoog gehou het. Mense het hom verafgod. Madiba het ’n mens altyd daarteen gewaarsku om ander mense te verafgod, en dit sluit onsself in. Hy het maar te goed geweet hoe vinnig ’n mens tot ’n val kan kom. Ons het Oscar op ’n hemelhoë voetstuk geplaas, wat beteken hy het verder geval het as wat ons ooit sou kon raai.

In *Conversations with Myself* is ’n brief wat Madiba op 9 Desember 1979 aan Winnie Madikizela-Mandela geskryf het:

> Daar word gesê dat ’n heilige ’n sondaar is wat aanhou probeer om skoon te leef. ’n Mens mag vir ’n driekwart van sy lewe ’n skurk wees en dan tot heilige verklaar word omdat hy die laaste kwart van sy lewe heilig leef. In die regte wêreld is dit nie gode wat ons teëkom nie, maar mense, net soos onsself. Mans en vroue vol teenstrydighede, wat stabiel én onvoorspelbaar kan wees, sterk én swak, beroemd én berug. Mense in wie se bloedstroom die miswurm elke dag in ’n stryd met kragtige insekdoders gewikkel is.

Hy het geglo dat daar goed en sleg in elke mens is en dit het my anders oor almal laat begin dink wanneer iets soos dié gebeur. Ek het verstaan hoeveel Madiba my denke en my persepsies van dinge wat vir ons eenvoudig lyk, verander het.

Op 9 Maart 2013 was Madiba terug in die hospitaal. Mevrou Machel het vir my gesê dit was nie ernstig nie, maar hy is opgeneem vir ’n

eenvoudige mediese prosedure. Dit het my net weer laat besef hoe kwesbaar hy was en elke keer wanneer hy in die hospitaal opgeneem is, is ek daaraan herinner dat my tyd saam met hom baie beperk was.

Na sy ontslag op 22 Maart het ek drie keer probeer om Madiba te besoek. Die eerste keer toe ek by sy huis arriveer, was Makaziwe daar. Sy het in vorige besprekings oor my dit duidelik gestel dat ek nie welkom was om haar pa te sien nie. Ek het nie werk gehad om daar te doen nie. Ek was vasbeslote dat die besluit nie by haar berus nie en ek het my voorgeneem dat ek haar sal probeer vermy, maar ek sou nie wegbly net omdat dit is wat sy wou hê nie. Mum moes weer vir my in die bres tree, want, het sy gesê, sy was bereid om Madiba se besluite te verdedig, of hulle daarvan hou of nie. Sy sou toesien dat sy wense vervul word tot die dag van sy dood. Sy het vir hulle gesê my besoeke maak hom emosioneel stabiel en toe ek haar dit hoor sê, het ek gedink ja, dit maak my ook emosioneel stabiel, al mag dit selfsugtig klink. Ek kon nie anders as om te glo dat 'n mens opgekou en uitgespoeg word wanneer mense nie meer 'n nut vir jou sien nie. Ek het maar al te goed geweet hoe Madiba daaroor voel, maar dit was nie my plek om te oordeel oor wat hy in daardie stadium gevoel het nie. Ek was in twee geskeur tussen baklei en om dinge net oor te laat aan hul eie verloop, en die laaste keuse voel asof dit die les is wat ek daaruit geleer het.

Die tweede keer, omtrent drieuur die middag toe ek hom weer wou besoek, was Makaziwe steeds daar. Teen dié tyd het mevrou Machel na haar kantoor vertrek. Ek het besluit om huis toe te gaan en met mevrou Machel ooreengekom dat ek sesuur die aand weer sou teruggaan. Ek het Madiba twee weke laas gesien en ek het beplan om die daaropvolgende dae by my familie deur te bring en ek wou hom sien voor my vertrek. Toe ek om sesuur by die huis aankom, was Makaziwe nie meer daar nie. Mevrou Machel het met iemand gepraat toe ek daar aankom en omdat ek ook sake gehad het om met haar te bespreek, het ek ingestem om te wag tot sy klaar is.

Dit het vir my gelyk asof die huispersoneel wat aan Makaziwe se kant was vir haar 'n teksboodskap gestuur het of haar gebel het om te sê ek is daar. Sy was gou terug. Op heel geheimsinnige wyse het die huispersoneel almal verdwyn terwyl ek in die kombuis gewag het. Makaziwe het ingekom en die deur agter haar toegemaak. Sy het gesê:

‘O, ek wil nou al lankal met jou oor iets praat. Daar is gerugte dat jy besig is om aan ’n dokumentêre rolprent met die History Channel te werk met die naam *Mandela: The Last Years*. Ek wil vir jou sê, aangesien jy een van die mense is wat Tata die meeste vertrou, sal dit hoogs oneties wees om so iets te doen.’

Wat my nog meer verras het, was dat sy vir die eerste keer in haar lewe erken het dat ek ’n rol in haar pa se lewe speel. Sy het waarskynlik iets gehoor omtrent die dokumentêre rolprent *Miracle Rising* wat glad nie oor Madiba handel nie en die twee sake met mekaar verwar, maar ek het nie die moeite gedoen om haar reg te help nie. My verpligting was teenoor haar pa, net soos wat my vertrouensverhouding met hom was. Ek was verplig om sy waardigheid en integriteit te beskerm, en ook dié van sy vrou, en dit was hoe ver dit gestrek het. Mense mag dan vra hoekom praat ek nou daaroor? Maar ek voel dis nou anders, ek skend nie sy waardigheid nie. Hierdie is nie ’n verslag oor sy mediese toestand of hoe siekte en lyding hom geraak het nie. Daar is baie dinge waaroor ek nooit sal praat of skryf nie. My verhouding was met Madiba, nie met die familie of enigiemand anders nie.

Die gesprek het vuriger geword en uiteindelik het mevrou Machel my laat roep. Ek is deur die klok gered, het ek gedink, anders sou ek dinge gesê het wat ek later sou berou. Ek het ’n kort gesprek met haar gevoer sonder dat ek Madiba gesien het, aangesien Makaziwe toe reeds boontoe is om by haar pa te wees en ek het geweet sy sou my uitjaag. Ek was diep teleurgesteld omdat ek hom nie kon sien nie, maar kwaad genoeg om te besef dat dit nie die beste tyd sou wees om aan te hou probeer nie. Die week daarna het ek teruggekom en hom wel gesien. Sy gesig het opgehelder toe hy my sien en hy het uitgeroep: ‘O, Zeldina, jy is hier.’

Ek het geantwoord: ‘Ja, Khulu, ek is. Hoe gaan dit?’

Hy het met sy duim gewys dit gaan goed en toe vra hy: ‘Hoe gaan dit met jou ouers?’ Ek was so diep geraak. Hy het nie meer baie gesê nie. Hierdie was weer die strekking van ons hele gesprek daardie dag, maar hy het nog belangstellend oor my ouers navraag gedoen. Hoe onverklaarbaar het hierdie man my lewe verander, my denke en, nog belangriker, my hart. Ek het ’n rukkie by hom gesit en sy hand vasgehou en toe hy aan die slaap raak, het ek uitgegaan.

’n Paar dae later was daar nuusberigte dat Zenani en Makaziwe die aanstelling van Madiba se jare lange vriend advokaat George Bizos, sy prokureur, Bally Chuene, en sy kameraad minister Tokyo Sexwale in die trust wat die verkope van kunswerke uit die *Hands and Art*-projek administreer, sou teenstaan. Madiba het hierdie trustees aangestel om sake namens hom te behartig. Dit sou ’n lelike geveg word. Die nuus het my diep ontstel en ek was onder die indruk dat die saak ’n hele paar maande vroeër afgehandel is. Aangesien hierdie persoonlike sake my nooit gepla het nie, het ek nooit die moeite gedoen om daaroor navraag te doen nie. Beledigings en teenbeskuldigings het in die media gevolg. Elke party het inligting van hul eie bronne aan die media uitgereik en op die mees onwaardige manier denkbaar na advokaat Bizos, een van Madiba se oudste vriende, gekap. Waarop dit neergekom het, was dat Zenani en Makaziwe hul pa se besluite wou bevraagteken. Hulle het baie goed geweet hy was nie meer in ’n posisie waarin hy homself of sy besluite kon verdedig nie. En dit was ’n gepaste tyd vir hulle om hierdie besluite teen te staan, omdat hulle geweet het Madiba se mening tel nie meer nie.

Ek was nie van plan om nou by hul private sake in te meng nie, maar ek het met die trustees se prokureur ooreengekom dat ek hulle sou verdedig indien ek gevra sou word om dit te doen. Die motief vir my besluit was eenvoudig. Indien Madiba sy familie wou aanstel om sy sake te behartig, sou hy dit gedoen het toe hy nog kon, en ek was gewillig om sy besluite met die feite tot my beskikking te verdedig. Dieselfde het gegeld vir die aanstelling van personeel en mense in beheer van sy liefdadighede, en sy prokureurs kon daarvan getuig.

In die prokureurs se beëdigde verklaring het dit aan die lig gekom dat Zezani Dlamini en Makaziwe Mandela inderdaad teen hulle pa se wense ingegaan het. Die prokureur het as bewys hiervan notules ingedien van vergaderings wat ons almal baie goed onthou het en waar Madiba sy wense duidelik uiteengesit het. Die saak is teruggetrek.

Ek moes myself daaraan herinner dat dit nie my stryd was om te stry nie. Ek moes daarop fokus om seker te maak mevrou Machel het die ondersteuning wat sy nodig gehad het en dat ek nou en dan vir Madiba ’n drukkie kon gee en sy hand kon vashou. Zoleka, een van Madiba se kleindogters, was dikwels by hom wanneer ek hom besoek

het. Sy was die ma van Zenani junior, wat in 2010 kort voor die Wêreldbeker-sokkertoernooi in ’n motorongeluk dood is. Zoleka is nie deur my teenwoordigheid bedreig nie en was gemaklik met my wat by haar oupa sit. Sy het regtig moeite gedoen om feitlik elke dag tyd saam met hom deur te bring en ek kon sien hy geniet dit.

Op 27 Maart 2013 moes Madiba weer in die hospitaal opgeneem word. Hy het weer longontsteking gehad. ’n Paar dae voordat ek die huis besoek het, het ’n lid van die huispersoneel baie swaar griep gehad terwyl ek daar was. Toe ek loop het ek my kop geskud. Ek kon dit nie glo nie. En nou was hy terug in die hospitaal met longontsteking. Ons het besoeke aan hom probeer beperk in opdrag van die mediese personeel wat verduidelik het dat sy immuunstelsel kwesbaar was. Op sy ouderdom was hy baie meer vatbaar vir kieme. En tog is mense in sy eie huishouding toegelaat om te werk al was hulle ook siek. Wat het hulle daar gemaak as hulle siek was? ’n Mens moes net weet wanneer om die handdoek in te gooi, nie omdat jy wou nie, maar omdat jy moes.

En weer het die wêreld asem opgehou. Hierdie was van die moeilikste tye wat ek nog ooit beleef het. Ek het besef dis goed as ’n mens nie weet wat vir jou voorlê nie, anders sou jy baie gou moed opgee. Wat ek ook al gedink het die ergste was wat ek nog beleef het, was hierdie verreweg die stresvolste tyd met die meeste angstigheid en onsekerheid. Ek was desperaat om na die hospitaal te gaan, maar ek het besef ek moet wegbly terwyl Makaziwe daar was. Ek wou Madiba ’n struweling spaar en ek was eenvoudig gewillig om deur mevrou Machel en Josina gelei te word oor die tye wanneer ek Madiba kon besoek. Op die dag waarop hulle ingestem het, het Josina my met ’n motor daarheen geneem. Ons het gesien die media kampeer buite die hospitaal en ons het gevrees dat hulle ons al twee op kamera sou betrap, soos in 2011 toe ons saam in die media verskyn het. Ek was bang dat ek weer die woede van sekere lede van sy familie op die lyf sou loop. Voor ons vertrek het ons ooreengekom dat ek op die agtersitplek sou wegkruip om te verhinder dat enigiemand my sien. Ondanks die spanning en stres oor Madiba het ons ’n bietjie verligting gevind toe ons gelag het oor die feit dat ek agter op die sitplek lê. Ek het gevoel soos ’n spioen in die Koue Oorlog wat van Oos- na Wes-Berlyn vervoer word. Madiba was elf aande in die hospitaal en is toe

teruggeskuif Johannesburg toe.

Toe dit beter gegaan het met hom, het ek en mevrou Machel beplan om te reël dat 'n paar van sy oudkollegas en vriende hom nou en dan besoek. Weke tevore wou die ANC se uitvoerende komitee hom besoek. Op die dag toe ek hulle gebel het om hulle te vra om hom te besoek, was daar 'n krisis waarna hulle moes omsien en hulle wou die besoek uitstel. Ek het geantwoord dat hulle vir ons moet sê wanneer dit hulle sou pas en ons het hulle aangemoedig om hom te besoek. Maar toe het Madiba siek geword en 'n hele paar weke het verbygegaan sonder dat ons of hulle die saak opgevolg het.

Vroeg in 2013 het doktor Mamphela Ramphele aangekondig dat sy 'n nuwe politieke party stig wat in die algemene verkiesing van 2014 sou meeding. Die enigste groot party wat die regerende ANC teenstaan was die Demokratiese Alliansie, 'n party wat steeds grotendeels gesien is as een wat deur wit mense oorheers word, al is die DA baie meer liberaal as die ou Nasionale Party. Doktor Ramphele is 'n akademikus wat baie respek in Suid-Afrika afdwing asook 'n voormalige aktivis teen apartheid en 'n vooraanstaande sakevrou. Sy was ook sedert die ontstaan daarvan 'n trustee van die Nelson Mandela-stigting. Baie mense het haar aankondiging verwelkom, maar haar party, Agang SA, het gelyk of dit vinnig momentum verloor. Doktor Ramphele was die eerste mens wat Madiba raad gegee het oor sy gesondheid na sy vrylating in 1990. Sy het hom aan die kardioloog voorgestel wat hom baie jare lank behandel het totdat die weermag se mediese span by private spesialiste oorgeneem het. Doktor Ramphele was dus 'n ou vriendin van Madiba en 'n goeie vriendin van mevrou Machel. Sy het mevrou Machel op 'n spesifieke dag besoek toe dit goed genoeg met Madiba gegaan het dat hy onder in die sitkamer kon sit. Sy was ontsteld oor sy agteruitgang, aangesien sy hom vir 'n lang ruk nie gesien het nie. Haar besoek was kort, maar sy het toe die fout gemaak om in 'n radio-onderhoud te sê dat sy hom gesien het.

'n Week tevore het die Demokratiese Alliansie sy verkiesingsveldtog met die naam 'Ken jou DA' geloods. Deel van die veldtog was om die publiek oor die DA se beleid in te lig en hulle het 'n foto van Madiba saam met die afgestorwe mevrou Helen Suzman gebruik waar sy hom omhels. Dit het die ANC senuweeagtig gemaak en hulle het na die DA gekap omdat hulle 'n foto van Madiba in hul verkiesingsveldtog

gebruik het. Die DA se veldtog en doktor Ramphele se besoek het die ANC onnodig ongemaklik gemaak. Niemand kon ooit die feit bevraagteken dat Madiba lewenslank tot die ANC verbind was nie, en tog het hierdie interaksies die ANC laat voel die party word uitgedaag oor sy 'eienaarskap' van Madiba.

Eerwaarde Jesse Jackson was in Suid-Afrika om 'n nasionale toekenning van president Zuma te ontvang vir sy bydrae tot die vryheidstryd in Suid-Afrika. Eerwaarde Jackson wou Madiba sien en iemand van die presidensie het my genader en gesê die president wou weet of 'n besoek aan Madiba moontlik was. Madiba was regtig nie gesond genoeg om besoekers te ontvang nie, en veral nie besoekers met wie hy nie goed vertroud was nie. Ek het dit aan die persoon van die presidensie verduidelik en hy het geantwoord dat hy verstaan en die boodskap aan die president en eerwaarde Jackson sou oordra.

Een van die mense op die lys wat Madiba wou besoek so gou as wat hy weer beter voel, was adjunkpresident Kgalema Motlanthe, wat maande lank probeer het en gevra het om Madiba te sien. Hy het meegeding om die presidentskap van die ANC by die party se nasionale konferensie in 2012 en verloor. Hy is toe deur die party kantlyn toe geskuif en dit was duidelik dat sy veldtog teen president Zuma hom ongewild gemaak het. Madiba het baie van Kgalema gehou en ek en mevrou Machel het die moontlikheid van 'n besoek bespreek. Op 'n Vrydagaand het ek Kgalema se assistent gebel om te sê ons probeer om iets vir die volgende week te reël, mits dit goed genoeg met Madiba gaan. Ek het vir hom gesê om nie vir enigiemand van ons gesprek te vertel nie.

Aangesien die stigting my kontrak verander het en omdat ek net deeltyds vir hulle gewerk het, was daar dae wat ek nie Johannesburg toe gegaan het nie, wat ek nie werk gehad het om te doen nie of besluit het om van die huis af te werk. Daardie Maandag was ek met iets anders besig en die grootste deel van die dag op my motorfiets. Ek het nie gekyk wat op Twitter aangaan nie en was feitlik die hele dag glad nie aanlyn nie.

Terwyl ek weg was, het 'n ANC-afvaardiging Madiba besoek en wat vreemd was, was dat hulle daarop aangedring het dat die besoek verfilm word as 'n soort 'bewys' dat Madiba leef en dat dit goed gaan met hom. Die plan het geboemerang. Madiba het allermins gesond

gelyk en het ook nie bly gelyk oor die besoek nie.

Die aand toe ek terug was in Johannesburg, het ek gekyk wat op Twitter aangaan en gesien die publiek was woedend oor die beeldmateriaal van Madiba wat daardie aand op die nuus verskyn het. Ek het niks daarvan geweet nie. Ek het dit op YouTube gevind en ek is gewalg deur wat ek gesien het. Madiba was duidelik ongelukkig. Daar was totale chaos in sy sitkamer en omdat dit ’n besoek van president Zuma en senior lede van die ANC was, is flitsfotografie toegelaat, iets wat elke Suid-Afrikaner geweet het verbode was as gevolg van die sensitiwiteit van Madiba se oë. In die beeldmateriaal lyk Madiba teruggetrokke omdat hy oorweldig was. Dit was vir my duidelik uit wat ek kon sien dat daar geen beheer was nie. Selfs die mediese personeel wat vir sy gesondheid verantwoordelik was, generaal Dabula en geneesheer-generaal Ramlakan, het toegelaat dat daar foto’s van hulle geneem word terwyl hulle Madiba se oë moes beskerm en na sy welstand moes omsien. Ek was ontsteld. Is dít nou die plek wat ons bereik het? Dit was soos ’n dieretuin en Madiba was in ’n hok vir die vermaak van toeriste. Hy het hulpeloos gelyk. Mevrou Machel het vergaderings by die stigting bygewoon, letterlik twee minute van die huis af, en sy is nie eens van die besoek in kennis gestel nie.

Hulle het vir my niks gesê nie, waarskynlik omdat hulle geweet het ek sou nie sulke drama toelaat nie. Mense het my gehaat omdat ek op orde aangedring het en vir hulle gesê het wat by Madiba toelaatbaar was en wat nie, en dit was duidelik hoekom. Wanneer ek nie daar was nie, was dit wat hulle gedoen het. ’n Oorlog het op Twitter uitgebreek en joernaliste het gevra waar ek was. Ek moes letterlik op my hande sit om te keer dat ek antwoord. Toe ek die volgende dag by die stigting opdaag en die destydse uitvoerende hoof, Achmat Dangor, sy walging oor die beeldmateriaal uitgespreek het, het ek gesê: ‘Wel, dis al wat hulle wou gehad het, is dit nie?’ Is dit nie hoekom mense daarop begin aandring het dat hy nie meer ’n sekretaresse benodig nie? As ek daar was, sou ek nie toegelaat het dat hy so weerloos en bleek voor die kameras verskyn het nie. Dit is nie net ek wat so gevoel het nie. Die publiek en familie was woedend vir die ANC.

In die daaropvolgende weke het dit vir my makliker geword om Madiba te sien. Die familie het nie meer so oor hom gewaak nie en ek

kon hom meer vrylik besoek. Ek het nooit op enige dag geweet of dit die laaste keer sou wees dat ek hom sien nie.

Op 8 Junie 2013 was Madiba terug in die hospitaal en die presidensie het aangekondig dat sy toestand ernstig maar stabiel was. Dit was ’n herhalende longinfeksie. Ons was baie angstig en het geweet dat hy uiters ernstig siek was. Twee dae na sy opname het ek op die agtersitplek van Josina se motor by die hospitaal ingeglip. Hy was baie duidelik siek en swak, maar hy het sy oë oopgemaak en geglimlag.

Dit was eers tóé dat ek gehoor het van die gebeure van die aand waarop hy in die hospitaal opgeneem is. Iemand, dit kon mediese personeel of veiligheidspersoneel gewees het, het besluit om hom in ’n ongemerkte militêre mediese voertuig hospitaal toe te neem sodat die publiek nie agterdogtig raak nie. My eerste vraag was: ‘Wie, watter publiek, hou Nelson Mandela drieuur in die oggend dop?’ Halfpad hospitaal toe het die ongemerkte voertuig onklaar geraak. Hulp was veertig minute later op die toneel. Ek het eers gedink dit was ’n grap. Hoe kan Nelson Mandela, dodelik siek, drieuur in die oggend in die middel van die winter veertig minute lank langs ’n hoofweg wag? Hoe gebeur so iets? Dis ’n goeie ding dat iemand my nie vroeër laat weet het nie. Ek dink dit sou my oor die afgrond gedryf het. Ek is op elke moontlike manier magteloos gelaat. Ontwapen. Ek het geen invloed of mag gehad om hierdie dinge te bevraagteken nie. En ek het gevoel asof ek Madiba en mevrou Machel versaak het. My hart het vir hulle gebloei. Hoe bang moes Madiba nie gewees het nie? En hoe bang, hulpeloos en gespanne moes mevrou Machel nie gewees het nie? Toe ek haar sien was sy duidelik getraumatiseer. Hoe het dinge so ver gegaan? Hoe kon hierdie dinge met Nelson Mandela, die mees geliefde persoon in die wêreld, gebeur? En die feit dat hy steeds geleef het, kon net as ’n wonderwerk beskryf word.

Die media het spoedig weer buite die hospitaal begin kampeer en joernaliste het van oral oor die wêreld ingevlieg. Miljoene dollars is bestee aan televisievoertuie vir buite-uitsendings en die hele wêreld het met ingehoue asem gekyk. Binne het die vegter stadig sy pad teruggevind. Party lede van die publiek het gereken dat dit tyd was vir ons om hom te laat gaan. Hou op om vir sy herstel te bid, het party gesê. Wat hulle nie besef het nie, was dat die hardkoppige

vryheidsvegter self sou besluit wanneer genoeg uiteindelik genoeg was. Ek het meer as twaalf uur per dag gewerk om mense van oor die wêreld heen se vrae te beantwoord en bevestiging te gee van wat die president gesê het: hy was kritiek maar stabiel. Ek het eenvoudig bevestig wat die president gesê het en was vaag met my antwoorde, maar mense was angstig. Josina en ek het voortdurend gesprekke gevoer waardeur ons mekaar ondersteun het. Ek het geweet as ’n mens nie die angstigheid verlig nie, sou dit ook ’n uitwerking op die familie hê en uiteindelik sou Madiba dit ook aanvoel.

Tydens een van haar besoeke aan die hospitaal het Madiba se dogter Zindzi vir Josina gevra of ek daar was. Zindzi het verduidelik dat sy gevoel het ek behoort ’n geleentheid te kry om haar pa te besoek, waarop Josina geantwoord het dat ek ’n paar dae tevore daar was. Zindzi het geantwoord: ‘Dan kan ek rus.’ Ek was diep ontroer toe ek hoor iemand anders as die Machels het na my omgesien en ek was dankbaar. Die dag na my besoek is die veiligheidsmaatreëls by die hospitaal verskerp. Ek en Josina het gelag toe ek vir haar sê ek dink hulle het daarop besluit omdat ek op haar motor se agtersitplek ingeglip het. Ek het toe vir haar gesê ek het myself oortuig dat alles nie oor my kan gaan nie. Te midde van die angstigheid het hierdie ongelooflike dinge ons ten minste laat lag. ’n Verslag het later gelui dat die verskerpte veiligheidsmaatreëls daarop gemik was om joernaliste uit te hou. Ek is bly dit was nie oor my nie.

Die laaste keer wat ek Madiba lewend gesien het, was op 11 Julie 2013, die aand voor ek sou vertrek op my jaarlikse motorfietsrit deur die land, Ek het Bikers for Mandela Day begin om my deel vir Mandela-dag by te dra. Ek het die hospitaal saam met Malenga Machel, mevrou Machel se seun, binnegestap. Ons het die agterste ingang gebruik sodat die media ons nie sou sien nie. Madiba was steeds baie siek. Ek het Malenga kans gegee om tyd saam met Madiba en sy ma deur te bring en daarna het hulle my ingeroep. Madiba kon nog steeds sy oë oopmaak en emosie wys, maar dan het hy baie vinnig weer ingesluimer. Ek het gebewe terwyl ek langs sy bed staan, geskok om hom in hierdie toestand te sien. Ek kon nie sy hande sien nie. Ek wou sy hand aanraak, maar ek kon dit nie vind nie. Ek was hulpeloos en verlam. Mevrou Machel het vir hom gesê ek is daar, maar sy oë het toe gebly. Sy het toe vir my geknik om te wys dat alles in orde was en

dat ek met hom kon begin praat.

Ek het geweet ek moet vrolik klink en nie hartseer nie en het gesê: 'Hallo, Khulu, dis Zeldina. Ek is hier om by u te kuier.' En daar kom dit toe. Hy het sy oë oopgemaak, gevolg deur die grootste, helderste glimlag, en hy het vir my gekyk en sy oë op my gevestig. 'Hoe gaan dit, Khulu? U lyk goed,' het ek gesê, al het hy nie goed gelyk nie. 'Ek mis u, Khulu,' het ek gesê en hy het aangehou glimlag. Mum en Malenga het my geterg en gesê Madiba het vir niemand anders só 'n groot glimlag gegee nie. Toe het hy ingesluimer en sy oë toegemaak. Ek het 'n paar minute lank daar gestaan. Mum en Malenga het na die ander kant van die kamer beweeg en Mum het gesê ek kon met hom praat as ek wou. Ek het weer gesê wat gesê moes word. Ek het myself reggeruk en vir hom gesê ek gaan die volgende dag op die motorfietsrit en hom herinner aan sy kommentaar oor my eerste rit in 2010. 'Hoekom doen jy dit?' het hy gevra, en ek het geantwoord: 'Vir u, Khulu.' Ek was weer op pad, vir hom. Dit was vir my bitter swaar om daardie aand van hom weg te gaan, maar die glimlag was net wat nodig was om my aan die gang te hou. Ek het nie geweet dat dit die laaste keer sou wees dat ek hom sien nie.

Na my terugkeer Johannesburg toe na die rit het ek 'n paar keer probeer om hom te gaan sien, maar elke keer wanneer ek Mum gevra het, was daar iets wat 'n besoek verhinder het. Ek het twee keer teruggegaan hospitaal toe om Mum oor ander sake te sien, maar ek kon Madiba nie besoek nie.

Op 15 Junie het 'n artikel op die voorblad van die *Saturday Star* verskyn wat die volgende dag in *Rapport* herhaal is. Shaun van Heerden, 'n vertroude lyfwag en vriend van langer as tien jaar, het geknak. Hy is 'n tweede keer op verpligte verlof geplaas na beskuldigings dat hy inligting aan die media uitgelek het oor waar Madiba hom bevind het toe hy in die hospitaal opgeneem is. In die artikel praat hy oor die voorval tydens die Wêreldbeker-sokkertoernooi in 2010 en die weermag se mediese personeel wat ons wêreld met 'n ystervuis regeer het. Ek het Shaun jammer gekry. Hy was die een wat my gehelp het om Madiba te sien wanneer ek ook al by die huis opgedaag het en mevrou Machel nie daar was om my deur die versperrings te help wat die familie daar geplaas het nie. Ek het nie geweet hoe ek sonder Shaun oor die weg sou kom nie.

’n Paar dae later het die storie oor die voertuig wat onklaar geraak het terwyl Madiba op pad hospitaal toe was, hoofopskrifte in die koerante wêreldwyd gehaal nadat dit aan die pers gelek is. Koerante het mevrou Machel as ‘rasend’ beskryf tydens hierdie gebeure. Die volgende dag het Makaziwe die hospitaal binnegekom en mevrou Machel ‘Miss Frantic’ genoem. Mum was seergemaak en emosioneel verpletter. Ek en Josina het haar aanhoudend probeer sterk hou met ons ondersteuning. Josina het haar ma gereeld gaan ondersteun wanneer ek nie kon nie. Ek het Prof gemis. Hy sou daar gewees het om ons te help en leiding te gee. Sy afsterwe het ’n leemte gelaat wat baie moeilik is om in woorde te beskryf.

In die week voordat Madiba in die hospitaal opgeneem is, het ’n goeie vriend van my wat by die Suid-Afrikaanse Brouerye werk my laat weet dat hulle ons ou familiehuishoudster, Jogabeth, opgespoor het. Sy was al die jare in my gedagtes en ek het haar ’n paar keer probeer soek, maar die soektog dan laat vaar wanneer ek my teen ’n klipmuur vasgeloop het. Jogabeth se man, Esau, was op pensioen van die SAB en deur net sy naam te noem en waar hy hom in die 1980’s bevind het, het hulle hom vir my opgespoor. Ek het dadelik vir my ma en broer teksboodskappe gestuur en een aand het ons almal vir Jogabeth en Esau gebel. Ons was oorstelp van blydskap omdat ons hulle in die hande kon kry. Ons het ’n groot samekoms beplan, maar toe het Madiba siek geword en ons moes dit uitstel. My hart was oorstelp en my oë vol trane toe Jogabeth sê: ‘Ek het jou al hierdie jare op televisie gesien en gedink my Zellie het grootgeword, maar hoe sal ek haar weer in die hande kry?’ Ek was diep ontroer deur die gevoel van samehorigheid. Ek hoop ek kan hulle binnekort ontmoet en ek wil kyk of daar enigiets is wat ek vir hulle kan doen in hul bejaardheid. Daar was ’n tyd toe sy haar lewe aan my gewy het. Nou is dit tyd om dieselfde guns aan haar te bewys.

Madiba het nooit opgehou om ons te verstom nie. Selfs sy lang siekte het ons en die wêreld ’n kans gegee om voor te berei vir ’n lewe sonder hom. Dit was vir ons almal moeilik. Ons was emosioneel uitgeput. Ek sou gereeld snags oor hom droom, soms goeie drome en soms nagmerries. Ek het elke oggend wakker geword en met ’n skok besef hy is nog steeds siek. Ek het senuweeagtig my hand uitgereik na

my selfoon om te kyk of daar enige nuus of boodskappe oor hom in die nag was. Ek was onophoudelik bekommerd oor hom. Ek sou kortstondig soos altyd aangaan met die lewe, maar dan sou die realiteit van die oomblik my terugruk na die nimmereindigende wagsaal waarin ons almal ons bevind het. Ek het nutteloos en waardeloos begin voel. My werk was nie meer voltyds nie en tyd het my soos 'n skip in 'n woeste storm behandel. Emosioneel was elke dag 'n wipplank. Ek is gefrustreer en seergemaak deur my onvermoë om Madiba te sien of na hom uit te reik. Die drome het duideliker geword en in die oggend moes ek myself oortuig dat dit net 'n droom was. Ek het die drome meer gereeld ervaar soos ek myself gereed gemaak het om die laaste stappie weg van Madiba te neem.

Wat my bekommer het en my wakker gehou het, was die gedagte of daar ooit 'n oomblik was wanneer hy bewustelik gedink het: 'Hoekom was Zeldina nie hier nie?' Ek krimp ineen wanneer ek nadink oor die feit dat hy teen die einde miskien gedink het ek het nie my belofte nagekom nie. Het hy dalk gedink ek het hom afgeskeep en hom versaak? En nou, negentien jaar later, het ek daarna verlang om my wit hand teen sy donker vel te sit, om die vel aan te raak wat ek grootgemaak is om te glo nie so goed soos myne was nie. Tog was dit daardie donker vel wat betekenis aan my lewe gegee het. Op die ouderdom van drie-en-veertig het my hele wese daarna gesmag om nog een keer aan sy hand te vat om die rimpels om sy kneukels te voel en om te sien hoe sy glimlag lig aan die vertrek verleen wanneer ek sê: 'Toemaar, Khulu, ek het u nie verlaat nie.'

13

Tot weersiens Khulu!

There is a scene in the movie Long Walk to Freedom where the character of Nelson Mandela slowly walks up a hill in Qunu. His back is towards the camera, as he walks away. The light is gentle, his familiar gait meandering up a gentle slope. I knew it wasn't him. It was Idris Elba, a British actor, but the image was so powerful, so evocative, so gutwretching that I burst into tears in the cinema. The tears came and came, over and over and in a way I have never experienced before. They just pumped from my eyes uncontrollably and streamed down my cheeks. It didn't help that I tried to stop it. That night when I first saw Long Walk to Freedom at its premiere in South Africa I also cried myself to sleep, something I had never done in forty-three years. It was like a pre-mourning. I knew Madiba had almost gone. That he was in pain. But this re-enactment of his life pierced through all that and reminded me about him so much.

Madiba never got to see the movie. It was released in November 2013 when he was near the end. It was a story he had given his blessing to almost two decades earlier. The producer, Anant Singh, bought the rights to Madiba's life story and it had taken twenty years for it to come to the big screen, just in time for us to be reminded of his story.

Besides reminding us of Madiba's sacrifices, the movie also reminded me of a younger, fitter Nelson Mandela. His body was so broken, so damaged and deteriorated now but in the movie he was strong, robust, vibrant. He loved to dance, not that shuffle of his later years when his knees had given out, but the jazzy bop of the 1950s. Madiba used to tell us how he went dancing in Sophiatown and through the movie I could now visualize such stories. We would often

sit during lunch or dinner on foreign travels, often just the two of us, and he would eagerly offer the details of his early life and he had the perfect audience in me. I had never had a problem allowing my imagination to run with a story and I would question him about his looks, his posture, his dress code, whether he charmed girls and what the dancing was like. He was amused by my directness and I often asked: 'Did women just fall over their feet to dance with you?' and he would laugh in a somewhat shy way and boast with a 'Yes of course!', upon which I would burst out laughing.

I had stopped seeing Madiba a few months before. Mrs Machel called me to the house one day to have tea, after Madiba had been discharged, although he was still considered critical but stable. She said that she knew how much I loved Madiba and that she didn't think it was advisable for me to see his deterioration knowing how I felt about him. At first I had suspected that the family told her to tell me that I was no longer able to see him, but after thinking about it I was happy that it happened. I didn't want to see him in a powerless state. I didn't want to lose control over my emotions in his presence. It was only after his death that I learned that indeed I had been banned from seeing him.

I was constantly battling in my mind, trying to understand why he didn't let go and whether he was able to let go himself. It haunts you. It eats you daily, piece by piece, not knowing and not understanding what was happening to him.

At times I wondered, like many South Africans, whether he was being kept alive artificially. But Mrs Machel and Josina told me there was a still a spark there, that he occasionally held someone's hand or managed to open his eyes. But by November even that didn't happen. He was slipping away, despite an overwhelming effort by the doctors to keep him alive.

His doctors thought it was amazing that he had such strength even when he was so weak. I often wondered – was he now becoming afraid of dying? He was often flippant about death, saying things like 'when you're gone your body is dead'. People raised the issues around his ancestors not having called upon him yet and I wondered whether he was aware of these issues. He was respectful of tradition but not overly obsessed with it.

As the days passed, I was permanently on standby, anxious, waiting for an update on his health. You start living in a permanent state of limbo. I communicated with Mrs Machel and Josina by text

and messaging because we were worried. Sometimes I met them trying to resume duties as normal and I would not often ask too many questions but just ‘Is he OK?’, ‘Mum, do you think he is free of pain?’ or ‘Mum, do you think he is aware of what is happening?’ I was also trying to be one less person asking after him and, rather, showing my support to him, through supporting her. He had after all told me the first day I met her in Paris back in 1996 that I had to look after her and not lose sight of her at any given point. I was still doing just that.

And then the message that I knew was inevitable. On 3 December Mum and Josina told me that Madiba’s condition was deteriorating. This seemed like the beginning of the end.

I saw Josina on Thursday, 5 December at the Foundation. She looked exhausted.

Early evening on Thursday, 5 December Josina phoned me with instructions from Mrs Machel. I had to inform some of Madiba’s closest friends that things were turning for the worse. It was so hard. So brutally frank. It took me hours to get hold of everyone on my list. They included people like Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, Ahmed Kathrada, Thabo Mbeki, George Bizos and others close to Madiba but who were outside government structures and who would not normally be informed in such instances. I was strong when I started making the calls but their reaction, a mixture of pain, shock and disbelief destroyed the strong spirit with which I started off. After each call I composed myself and repeated Madiba’s quote: ‘It always seems impossible until it is done’, and I would call the next person.

Later in the evening two helicopters flew dangerously low over my house. As I lived halfway between Pretoria, the base where military helicopters were stationed, and Johannesburg, where Madiba’s house was, the helicopters had to fly over the area where I lived. Was the military preparing for the worst? Or had it happened? If it was the military it meant that it had happened. There were two issues to consider: firstly they probably became involved at that point from a protocol point of view, and secondly I thought that they perhaps feared the much speculated uhuru or ‘night of the long knives’ when, it was said, blacks would kill whites the night after Madiba died. It was only the extremists that participated in this kind of talk and I knew by now that South Africa was stronger and more capable as a nation of dealing with what we all feared, black and white: Madiba’s death.

And then it was done. I just knew he was gone. I didn’t have to

ask. I was numb for a few minutes and then I jumped up from my chair at the kitchen table thinking it would stop me from becoming hysterical. I went outside and sat quietly alone in the hot summer night just thinking, praying and trying to internalize what had just happened. I was alone at home and my first instinct was that I had to pray, light candles and then get to bed as soon as possible. I knew what lay ahead. My phone started going crazy. I didn't answer anyone and rumours were running. About two hours later I started receiving messages from as far away as Los Angeles: 'Is Madiba OK?' I knew that if I answered one message then it would spread like a velt fire. I also did not want to lie.

My phone didn't stop ringing and I decided to put it on silent, took two sleeping pills and went to bed. I knew that the President had to make an official announcement but I had no idea when that would be done. I told the CEO of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, Sello Hatang, that I needed to meet him at the office at 6 a.m. the following morning. He agreed and off I went to bed.

I sent a message to my brother and his partner Rick, asking them to collect my dogs early the next morning. I said: 'Please don't ask any questions, just fetch Winston and Indira as early as possible.' They would need to be cared for and I knew I would not be at home much over the next couple of days.

On 6 December 2013 I awoke just after 4 a.m. I had twenty-eight missed calls and literally hundreds of emails, texts and messages already. I showered and when I went downstairs to have coffee I sat reading through some of the messages. The world had woken me to my worst nightmare. Madiba was gone. The President made the announcement during the midnight hours and to this day I have not seen the footage of the announcement.

I called my parents before 6 a.m. They had both heard already. They sleep with the radio on in their room and when the usual music on the radio was interrupted by an announcement by the President my dad woke my mom to tell her. My dad, the man who warned me about the terrorist's release back in 1990, wept like a child for Madiba and spent the entire night watching events unfold on TV. When I heard the sadness of their voices over the telephone I broke down for the first time.

I rushed to the office and found some of my colleagues there already. Everybody was emotional but we composed ourselves, like soldiers moving into total operational mode, knowing that we had to

get work done right away in preparation for the next few days. Condolence books had to be bought, statements prepared and we needed to create the space for the public to mourn Madiba's passing too. The staff were brilliant and under the leadership of Sello they had created such a space in no time. I also called one of my friends, Minèe, to our office and asked her to supervise my phones and start responding to people. I needed help to contain the activity on my phones. The media started hunting me for comment or a response of some sort and Minèe had to keep the pressure at bay while I tried to figure out what to do next. To try and cage in the media pressure I decided to issue a statement. As I sat in front of my computer words and tears started flowing at the same time.

The Nelson Mandela Foundation agreed to issue my statement. I wrote:

> I often battled with the relentless pressure. But then I looked at him who carried himself with such grace and energy. I never left. I never could. Nelson Mandela did not demand loyalty, but he inspired profound and unwavering loyalty from everybody whose life he touched. And now, as we grieve the departure of Madiba, I am slowly coming to terms with the fact that I will never see him again. But heroes never die. As sad as it makes me that I will never walk into a room again and see his generous infectious smile or hear him say 'Oh Zeldina, you are here', I have come to terms with the fact that Madiba's legacy is not dependent on his presence. His legacy will not only live on in everything that has been named after him, the books, the images, the movies. It will live on in how we feel when we hear his name, the respect and love, the unity he inspired in us as a country but particularly how we relate to one another . . . I will cherish every smile, the pleasant but also the difficult times and especially my barefoot moments . . . Tot weersiens Khulu [until we meet again grandpa]!! Will love you every day for the rest of my life.

The reality of it all hit home as I typed the last sentence. I was saying goodbye. Was this really happening? I had never, ever imagined that I would be sitting at my desk typing these words and it felt as if I was saying goodbye from another stratosphere. Minee was receiving calls and responding to messages on my behalf. People reached out to me from a personal perspective because it was known to them in particular how much he meant to me, but then others also called

because I was their link to Madiba. They didn't know how or where to express the sadness over their loss. I first had to figure out what needed to be done before I could start thinking about my own feelings.

For some time I had worked with Mrs Machel and Josina to compile lists for this eventuality. They included people who had served Madiba, people who had been with him during the Rivonia and Treason Trial, friends, the heads and trustees of all his charities, supporters and those we always called upon when Madiba needed something – not only for his charities but also sometimes to get a job for one of his grandchildren or to help a child with something specifically. The lists had been updated several times but the last one was updated in June 2013 when Madiba was hospitalized. The lists were then submitted to Makaziwe and Ndileka Mandela, Madiba's eldest grandchild. They were the only two family members involved in funeral arrangements and they had been planning the funeral for the past eight years.

The state originally had a plan to have the funeral at the Union Buildings, the centre of power in South Africa and the place where all other state funerals were held in history. Although Madiba wanted to be buried in Qunu he didn't specify that he wanted a state funeral in Qunu. He was a simple man with modest needs, somehow underestimating his importance to the world.

This funeral was going to be about maintaining power over the Mandela legacy and roles within the Mandela family.

I felt gratitude to those who remembered me and the small role I had played in Madiba's life. Archbishop Desmond Tutu mentioned me during a very moving sermon he gave at St George's Cathedral in Cape Town. But as a humble reminder of how we are all forgettable, replaceable, he forgot my surname and called me Zelda van Graan repeatedly. He was becoming old too. Fragile and upset at the passing of the man he respected. Amid the sadness people were texting and tweeting me saying that if they were me, they would just change their surname now to Van Graan. It was funny but I couldn't laugh at the time.

I was also incredibly touched by Defence Minister Nqakula's statement about me, thanking me for my years of service. She said that she didn't ever think I had time to have a boyfriend and although I didn't want people to talk about it she was right, and it was the first time someone said it in public. There was a time I couldn't be with a

man for twenty minutes without Madiba calling on me to do something. I never got angry. He was my number one. When I occasionally had a fling or a dysfunctional relationship I could never give it my full commitment. My job was everything and I didn't mind it. It was my choice. Her thanking me made me even more emotional. I had never expected to be thanked by anyone. Madiba thanked me. That was enough to me and my blessings having been chosen to serve him were beyond any expectations I had from life. But for someone from the ANC to thank me really ripped my heart apart. I didn't care for Madiba just because I cared for him. I knew millions of others cared for him too and I tried to serve his interests best to ensure that those relationships with others could be honoured.

My Twitter and Facebook accounts, text and emails were suddennly flooded with people thanking me. It was all too overwhelming and simply too many to answer. I am a person for detail and a left-brain thinker and at first I thought I would thank each and every one personally, but as time passed my cellphone constantly froze on me as a result of traffic and I simply didn't get the time to do what I wanted. What made it worse was that the people pouring out their gratitude to me had all suffered the same loss. They all had their own emotions to deal with yet they thought of me. I was deeply touched.

We now had to figure out how the people on those Madiba 'friends lists' got accredited. Sello, the now-CEO of the NMF tried from his side to get info too, while staff worked around the clock putting out fires of disorganization from people who wanted confirmation of arrangements. Sello as CEO couldn't get any detail and neither could his staff. People were calling asking for details about the memorial service to be held at the FNB Stadium in Soweto on Tuesday, 10 December. I couldn't answer anyone as I didn't have information and it was not forthcoming. In addition to the Madiba 'friends list', as we called it, the Machel family was suddenly told that they would only be allowed five accreditations and Mrs Machel would count as the first. So she plus four other Machels would be allowed accreditation at her own husband's funeral. It is so ridiculous that you actually couldn't help but laugh out loud at this.

In the few days to follow before the memorial many of us hardly slept, trying to make sense of arrangements and trying to get information. To say it was chaotic would be an understatement. A combination of bad planning and state secrecy, it seemed surprisingly

badly managed for an event that had been inevitable. I had travelled with Madiba across the world, attending functions where there were sometimes hundreds of heads of state present. Arrangements at such big events were always a little haphazard yet I had never experienced such chaos. No one person could give you all relevant information and plans were changed every few minutes. Even those in charge didn't know the answers to anything, it seemed.

On Sunday night, after much fighting and crossfire of words between myself, the government's protocol people and the family, we were saved by a senior ANC official. She came to our rescue when she managed to get the accreditations for the Machel family and delivered them to the Saxon Hotel where Josina and I were meeting.

It was becoming farcical. If we could barely get Nelson Mandela's widow and her children accredited to attend his memorial service, it was becoming downright impossible to get anyone else officially accredited.

In the meantime the advance teams for President Obama and President Clinton had arrived and were trying to get details from everyone – me included. Tempers were flaring as everyone felt the pressure and frustration of the disorganization. I repeatedly asked why they had been planning for eight years and now no one could give us any answers. We appeared unprofessional and caught off guard. We received assurance that we would get the Madiba 'friends lists' accreditation the next day.

Early Monday morning we started calling around. By 2 p.m. one of our friends, Basetsana Khumalo, went to the ANC head office to collect accreditation for the 'friends lists', but then we realized that only half the people on the list had been accredited. The memorial was the next day. There was no way people from abroad would take the risk to fly to South Africa for the memorial or funeral if they did not know for sure whether they would be accredited. No invitations were sent and Madiba's friends were expected to go to the stadium on a first-come-first-served basis to get access and then be seated with the crowds of public people attending the memorial. That included people like Archbishop Tutu.

In the midst of all of this, just when it seemed things couldn't get worse, I remembered an appointment I had scheduled the previous week. Root canal. The pain in my tooth was shadowed by the pain of my heartbreak. A friend, Marli, collected me and took me to the dental surgeon. I couldn't manage to drive and answer the stream of

phone calls and queries at the same time. Marli answered my phone during the root canal procedure and then asked me questions while I was lying open mouthed in the surgeon's chair, close to being strapped down by the dentist as illustrated in cartoons. I would write the response to Marli on a piece of paper, nearly illegibly, but she managed to give directions for the hour and a half I was in the chair. The surgeon soon realized that he was not going to complete the job and asked me to return the following week for the rest of the work. He realized I was under pressure and he was exceptionally patient. He managed to stop the pain and off we went.

With a mouth full of cotton wool and enough painkillers to numb my brain as well as my mouth (I did ask him to inject me with more than the allowed quantity of local anaesthetics to try and calm my nerves as well, although he declined), I tried to convey to people that I still didn't have any information. I tried to remain optimistic. But as soon as I managed to answer everyone, the first person on the list would start asking for an update again. I was bordering on a nervous breakdown and couldn't bear the pressure.

At times Josina, Basetsana and I all yelled at one another, then we cried hysterically and then we would pick up the pieces and try to find order again. We knew our outbursts were safe with one another no matter what the nature. George Cohen, the manager at the Saxon Hotel who had become a good friend, as well as the owners, the Steyn family, insisted that I stay at the hotel during the funeral time. George wanted to support me and tried to do so in every possible way. I lived some distance out of Johannesburg and by offering for me to stay in the city he already alleviated some pressure.

As some of Madiba's friends also stayed at the Saxon Hotel it made it easier, not having to communicate with them all in different venues but from within the hotel. Whenever I got one piece of information, no matter how mundane, I would share it with George and he would disseminate it to the friends who were staying in the hotel and even beyond to those he had contact with. The staff at the Foundation were busy with their own arrangements at the office to create a public space for mourning and George and the hotel staff helped me to take calls, they sent drivers around to try and help us get information, and in addition George force-fed me. On more than one occasion he found me sobbing, a mixture of pain and frustration, and he would calm me and help think of ways to find solutions. To me Madiba's friends all felt they were important in his life and their requests for information

or detail were legitimate and my inability to help anyone seemed unprofessional and uncaring.

On Monday night the Minister of Defence called to say I had to travel to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to sort out the accreditation of the ‘friends lists’. She suggested this to be the only solution at such a late hour. By now I had texted and called every possible person I thought could help us. By 7 p.m. on Monday night, we didn’t even know yet what time the proceedings were to start the next day.

It wasn’t just us. The media were also unable to plan. The government was working on a ‘need to know’ basis – slowly giving out information tidbit by tidbit.

In the meantime Madiba was being embalmed at 1 Military Hospital in Pretoria. From my friend Robyn Curnow, who had been briefed by the family for years, I learned that he was being ‘escorted’ to the afterlife by the elders of the Thembu tribe. They would talk to him, explaining the process of what was going on day by day. Madiba detested red tape and bureaucracy and I couldn’t but wonder what his response would be if he had been told about our frustration.

My friend who took me to the dental surgeon drove me to the Union Buildings, accompanied by Sara Latham, the advance for President Clinton and an old friend too. She was sent to South Africa by the Clintons personally to also support me in whatever way possible. Half way to the Union Buildings Basetsana called us to say that they were not printing accreditations at the Union Buildings and that we had to return to Johannesburg, so we did. We were told that we would receive the remaining accreditations by 10 p.m. At 10.30 I called again and Josina and I were told that we would receive word by 1 a.m. Tuesday morning. At 1 a.m. we were told 3 a.m. So, we didn’t go to sleep; 3 a.m. arrived and 3 a.m. passed without any word. We were still waiting. By 5 a.m. we started calling around. People like the business tycoon Johann Rupert had flown from Cape Town to attend the memorial, but his accreditation too was not delivered. At 6 a.m. I delivered two accreditation cards at the gate of his house, cards with names on that weren’t known to him or his wife. There was no other way I could help him. Johann got on his plane and returned to Cape Town.

Johann was one of the people Madiba always called upon whenever he needed financial help for a project. Madiba’s relationship with the family dated back to negotiations in the early 1990s after Madiba’s release, yet here this man could not go to Madiba’s memorial

despite the fact that Madiba considered him as one of his sons.

In addition, none of the Nelson Mandela charities, their respective CEOs or trustees had been accredited. Their names all appeared on the list that was submitted on several occasions over the previous two years. Long-serving staff members who played critical roles in Madiba's life were omitted from accreditation.

At 8 a.m., after sleeping for only forty-five minutes, I arrived at our offices from where the Machel family was going to depart. I profusely apologized to Prof. Ndebele, the Chairman of our Foundation, and to Sello our CEO and I was deeply disappointed, hurt and embarrassed that they had not been catered for. Had my name not been submitted by Mrs Machel as part of her family list, I would not have been accredited. It seemed like chunks of Madiba's past were being whitewashed or ignored. The people he personally appointed, the legacy institutions he established were being marginalized in an act of pettiness.

Advocate George Bizos, one of Madiba's oldest friends and the lawyer whose relationship with Madiba dated back to the Rivonia Trial, arrived at the office too, as his name was submitted as family too. I helped him onto the bus and asked Lori, my friend from Los Angeles and Morgan Freeman's business partner, to remain with him at all times. Arriving at the stadium it was chaos. It rained continuously and an unrelenting storm passed over Johannesburg. Some people said this was lucky and that the gods were welcoming Madiba. He would have thought that was nonsense. The rain further complicated an already difficult and chaotic situation. Someone recently said that Madiba didn't like too much of a fuss being made over him and that the rain was probably his way of ensuring that not too much of a fuss was being made.

We were sent from pillar to post between suites. Up and down we walked with the elderly Advocate Bizos. At one point I tried to assist Archbishop Tutu, Kofi Annan and the Elders as they were manhandled by police at one of the doors to a suite. It felt so disrespectful to me.

When Bono, Sol Kerzner, Charlize Theron and Douw Steyn's wife and children arrived they were also blocked access to any of the suites. A protocol officer literally chased them away and directed them to 'any open suite' along a long corridor. I escorted them and simply took them to the closest empty suite, where there was no catering and only orange plastic chairs to sit on. At least they had privacy there. What made it worse was that the suite was situated

behind a screen to the back of the stage where they could hardly see anything. I told them that I would return to fetch them once I had made arrangements for them to enter somewhere more dignified but that they needed to stay in the suite for now as I did not want them to be manhandled by police or protocol people. The only words that repeated in my mind were: 'to honour Madiba, you have to honour his relationships'. If it was the last thing I would do for him, I would try to honour the relationships he had nurtured.

After fighting, more crying, yelling and losing my temper, Jessie Duarte, the Deputy Chair of the ANC, came to my rescue. I had told her what had happened and she entered the argument with the protocol officials and police at the door to the Ministerial suite to allow Madiba's friends access to a decent suite. She shared my frustration and thought it was unacceptable that people were treated with such disdain. She allocated a protocol person and one of our friends went off to fetch them.

Madiba detested events where endless speeches were made. He detested people singing his praises for hours and hours. He argued that once someone has said something good about you, it was enough. It was hardly the celebration of his life we had hoped for. It was not a public holiday and the 90,000-capacity stadium was not even half-full. It was embarrassing. People had to take time off from work to attend the memorial, and being right before the Christmas holidays many probably simply could not take leave to attend the memorial service.

Josina and Malenga Machel, Mrs Machel's two children and Madiba's two stepchildren, had not been catered for either. They were with us, and the rest of the Machel family, in the Ministerial suite. Halfway through the programme someone came to announce to them that there was provision for them on the field with the rest of the family, but we stopped them from humiliating themselves and walking onto the field as an 'afterthought'. Madiba had spent more time with these two young people than with many of his own blood. They made him smile, yet they were treated with what struck me as the utmost disrespect.

President Clinton called me to the Presidential suite because he, Secretary Hillary and Chelsea wanted to greet me. JD, the President's PA, fetched me and when I saw them I nearly collapsed. It was like seeing your parents and family. I have spent many hours with them over the past nineteen years and they had appreciation for how much I loved Madiba and I knew how much he loved them. They shared the

pain we were all feeling. They really deeply loved him, over and above professional admiration. Seeing them made me realize that the loss was theirs too. It was irrelevant how much time you spent with Madiba. Your relationship with him depended on how you felt about him in your heart, and the Clintons understood that.

President Obama had what we described as a Martin Luther King moment and delivered a speech that will go down in history as one of his best. Too many speeches were made though, and it was not the celebration of Madiba's life we had hoped for. It took hours and hours for the speeches to be completed, with very little singing and dancing or musical items – something Madiba would have preferred. It just exposed how badly some people really knew Madiba that they could get it so wrong.

Very embarrassingly, President Zuma was booed by his own compatriots every time his name was mentioned or his face appeared on one of the big screens in the stadium. I was not in the least surprised. It was the same disrespect towards the President that Jacob Zuma had not condemned during his rape trial some years before, when ill-disciplined ANC youth started burning t-shirts emblazoned with the face of the then President Thabo Mbeki, that now manifested itself in a different time and in a different form. It was like a relationship in which abuse occurs. Once you allow it to happen you can never go back over the line that was crossed. It was allowed back then, so why would it not be allowed now? I was embarrassed not only for President Zuma but for South Africa as a whole.

* * *

On Tuesday night after the memorial we went to the Houghton house to see Mrs Machel, and President Clinton and his family departed South Africa soon after that. Sol Kerzner, one of the people who always brought a smile to Madiba's face, also left, and the astute businessman had a sadness in his eyes too. Even if Sol or the Clintons hadn't called, I sometimes in the last years told Madiba that they had, and it always brought about a smile whenever I saw that Madiba's mood needed a lift. They visited as often as they could and whenever their business brought them to South Africa, and President Clinton, without fail, always made sure that he combined his other visits to Africa with a visit to South Africa over Madiba's birthday period.

Before I went to sleep I tried to make arrangements for Bono,

Naomi Campbell and the Steyn family to go and pay their respects at the Union Buildings the next morning, where Madiba was lying in state. Madiba liked Bono as he used his profile as a celebrity to support good causes. In turn we could always call on Bono to perform at concerts and events to benefit Madiba's charities, without charging an appearance fee or travel expenses. Naomi was the first celebrity to support the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund publicly, and she got christened the first of Madiba's honorary granddaughters. And after Madiba left his Soweto house on his separation from Winnie Madikizela Mandela, the Steyn family housed Madiba for six months and he completed the writing of Long Walk to Freedom in their house and where the interim constitution was prepared by the ANC. They entertained Madiba's friends and comrades and provided a space for him to spend time with his son Makgatho's children. These people all deserved their rightful place in Madiba's life and now they had not been catered for to pay their last respects at the Union Buildings while Madiba was lying in state.

Bridgette Radebe, the wife of our Minister of Justice Jeff Radebe, offered to come round to the Saxon Hotel to help us get to the Union Buildings the next morning. Roads were all cordoned off and unless your car was accredited you were expected to go and stand in a queue for hours to take public transport to the Union Buildings. At 6 a.m. on Wednesday morning Bridgette called to say that Jeff would be there at 8 a.m. I waited until 7 a.m. and then asked George, the manager at the Saxon, to wake Naomi, Bono and the Steyns. At 8 a.m. Bridgette called to say that Jeff had been called to another ceremony and that he would not be able to help us. Panic struck again. How was I supposed to get these people to the Union Buildings? Surely the government couldn't expect these VIPs to go and stand in a queue for five or six hours with the public to pay their last respects to Madiba?

I felt impotent. I had always been able to fix things, to open doors, but one by one they were closing. It didn't help to contemplate how this would have angered Madiba. You simply square up and deal with it and find another way around.

While I was having a telephone conversation at the Saxon, former President F. W. de Klerk, who was also staying at the hotel, overheard me. Mr de Klerk was the President in 1990 when Madiba was released from prison. Madiba liked him and spoke of him with great respect and I shared that respect. After I finished the call he said: 'Zelda, speak to Norman, my security, and see if you can work out something

with him to help you.’ And at 9.15 we all left in convoy with former President de Klerk and his wife Elita. The irony in this was just too much for me. Here the man who represented apartheid to so many was, in a way, rescuing Madiba once again. It was just too much to handle and it is something I so badly wanted to tell Madiba about. It wouldn’t have surprised him though that Mr de Klerk came to our rescue. He truly believed that despite their political differences from time to time, Mr de Klerk was a reasonable and good human being.

Arriving at the Presidential guest house, the celebrities were allowed in but I was shut out together with the Steyns. When Minister Jeff Radebe and wife Bridgette arrived they had to escort me inside and I had to figure out a plan to get the Steyns inside. Eventually we managed to get all our guests transported to the Union Buildings where Madiba was lying in state.

As we walked down the steps of the Union Buildings a calmness came over me. I had to be ready to say goodbye to Madiba. I had to get the words right in my head. I didn’t plan to say anything out loud but he would hear me. He always knew what I thought before I could even say it. And when I sometimes told him something or raised something with him he would say, ‘You know, Zeldina, it’s strange that you mention it, I was just thinking about that now.’ It won’t be different this time, I decided.

A few steps from the coffin I realized that it was going to be too difficult. I hadn’t seen him in a few months. I had already started missing him. Naomi was walking behind me and she then froze. She was scared and again tears streamed from my eyes. I was hysterical and as much as I wanted to help her, I couldn’t help myself. I was holding on to Bridgette Radebe’s hand but she then let me go and took Naomi’s hand. I wanted her to help Naomi too. The next moment Olivia Machel, Samora Machel’s daughter and Mrs Machel’s stepdaughter, took my left hand and Bono took my right hand with his wife Ali on the other side and it was our turn to approach the coffin.

I was as composed as I could be until my eyes met those of Mandla Mandela, Madiba’s grandson, standing guard next to his grandfather’s coffin. My heart shattered. A physical pain I cannot describe to anyone but I am sure has been felt by many people. I so badly wanted to walk to Mandla to give him a hug but I couldn’t. Mandla was like my little brother.

Bono and Olivia led me to the coffin and there was Madiba. Lifeless. Dead. Cold. Khulu was gone. The first thing I noticed was the

scar on the side of his neck where they obviously inserted a tube. Probably a tube from the many that had given him life the last six months. Now there was nothing, nothing left but the scar. The hole was closed but when you work with someone for so long you eventually even know each other's scars. I knew every little mark on his face and this one in his neck was new. Then I noticed that he was a dark grey colour and next I noticed that his chest was completely flat. As flat as the top of a table. It upset me to see him like that but I knew that I only had a minute to say goodbye. Bono took charge and said a prayer, and although it was beautiful I couldn't breathe and suppress my gasping. He thanked God for blessing us with Madiba and asked Him to be with Madiba and with us while we put sense to life after Madiba. Bono led us away and I felt like turning around and running back. I still wanted to say, something. We always have something more to say, don't we? But life has taught me that we will often more regret the things we didn't say than the things we said and I had made sure in the last few years that I told Madiba how much I loved him and appreciated him. I never wanted to regret not saying it, and walking away I knew that it was the one thing he knew about me as he was lying there.

Bono and Olivia held my hands and I cannot remember climbing the stairs up the Union Buildings, probably doing so for the last time. On the journey back to the Presidential guest house, no one said a word. By now I had stopped trying to control my tears, they were just cascading from my eyes. I felt like I couldn't breathe and I wanted to be alone, by myself, but I had others to think about.

Back at the Saxon we had lunch and I was very sad to let Bono and his wife Ali go. I have also become close to their staff over the years and they have become close friends. They have all become somewhat of a spiritual pillar and Bono is a bit of a preacher man. He has a very deep understanding of life and throughout Madiba's prolonged illness he often sent messages of encouragement, never asking for anything or for information but sending a string of beautiful words. I remembered the saying 'we're all just here walking each other home', and it calmed me a little; I was exhausted from the tension and emotions of the day. In a way I also felt that Madiba's friends were all a special breed of people. He attracted a certain kind of person and I know it would have pleased him that they were there looking out for me. 'That's good, Zeldina,' he would say.

*   *   *

The ad hoc lack of planning continued and I had to make a decision on how to survive the next few days. There had been brief moments of breaking down but there hadn't been time to sit and think, to internalize the reality of Madiba's passing. I did not have time to think about myself or fully come to terms with the event. Also, not having seen Madiba for a couple of months made it almost unbelievable to think he was really gone. I'd got used to the fact that he was home, and waking up every morning with the first thought crossing my mind that he was critically ill. You never knew how any day would end but you never expect the end either.

My challenge now was to get Alfre Woodard, Oprah, Gayle King, Stedman Graham, Forest Whitaker and Richard Branson accredited for the funeral in Qunu. It was planned at Madiba's home village for Sunday 15 December 2013. They had all travelled from the US to be there but I was not sure whether we would succeed in getting them accredited. They were below the status of heads of state yet they were above a ministerial level. There was no level catering for their needs. They had to be treated like the public, with the rest of the masses. I would not have any of that. The bizarre and unnecessary difficulties of an event that had been planned for eight years continued.

Arriving at Madiba's house to deliver something to Mrs Machel I was told by the uniformed police on duty that I could not enter the premises as my accreditation to the house had expired. It was not a person I had seen before and she refused me access. However, next to her one of Madiba's bodyguards was seated. He didn't try to help and kept quiet. I went into the guard house and tried to call the kitchen staff to ask them to verify that I was expected at the house. I couldn't get through on the phone. I asked the bodyguard how long he had worked for Madiba and he responded eight years. I told him that I was called to the house by Mum and asked whether he did not think his behaviour by not helping me to get in was unacceptable. He responded by saying he was not on duty and simply keeping the lady in uniform company. My last response to him was: 'How do you think Madiba would react if he heard you now? Having served him, you should know. I don't have to answer for you. You really ought to be proud of yourself.' I called Mum on her cellphone, of course again in tears, and she sent her bodyguards to come and collect me at the gate.

Arriving in the house I was told that I needed photo accreditation. I went to the room in the back of the garden where accreditation was

done by state protocol officials and told them that Mrs Machel, as she had, had asked me to come for accreditation. They refused to accredit me and said my name was not on the list and that Makaziwe and Ndileka were the only ones that could give permission for me to be accredited. I left and went to Mrs Machel again to tell her that I was leaving and would not be staying for the prayer service she'd invited me to. I was disgusted that it was left to the mourning widow to intervene to get us accredited. She instructed Makaziwe's husband, Isaac, to accompany me to the room again to try to get me accredited. Despite him telling them that he was Makaziwe's husband and then saying that it was a 'special request from Mrs Machel' they refused. It was only after a long argument that they agreed. I thought it somewhat strange that Isaac put this to them as a special request from Mrs Machel.

I went to greet Mrs Machel and left. She wanted me to stay for the prayer service but I was too upset. I assured her that I would be around if she needed any assistance. She still relied on me for some of the administrative issues that I had performed while Madiba was alive: paying accounts or making transfers as instructed by them. I think the irony of it all intensified my own emotional feelings. The family was fast to call me to ask whether a transfer to them had been made, but felt that I wasn't good enough to be treated like a human being or afforded just the courtesy of a basic greeting when they passed me, let alone accredited with just a little dignity.

I still had the Oprah/Branson/Whitaker obstacle of accreditation to overcome and left the house.

The next few hours were spent on doing exactly that. I emailed everyone, called, sent text messages to people to ask them to accommodate Madiba's friends, and the same state protocol people told even the Director General of the Presidency that they did not take instructions from him. It appeared that some sections of government were at loggerheads with other members of government. I felt that it was nothing about honouring Madiba or giving him the dignity he deserved but all about asserting power and settling scores. But on the other hand, no one really knew who was in charge. One couldn't help but wonder whether it was just eight years of bad planning, wasting money on foreign travel to consult with other countries about events of this magnitude, or whether it was a deliberate attempt to exclude from Madiba's funeral people who were not aligned with the right people. Surely if you have eight years to plan, you get it right. It was

distasteful to listen to and it deeply pained me that people who loved Madiba dearly were to be treated like that. They insisted that Oprah and others came to the accreditation room at the Houghton house to be accredited. I communicated this to everyone.

Sadly I heard that the accreditation was only done after Oprah, Forest, Gayle and others had had to pose for countless photos with the protocol people. It was revolting. I could not imagine that Madiba would have agreed to this type of treatment of his friends. I would never, ever, have subjected Madiba to this kind of treatment, yet here his friends were expected to pose for photos with fans in order to smooth their way through accreditation. In nineteen years of serving Madiba I had never, not once, asked any of his guests for photos with them. I had never asked Madiba to take a photo with me. Photos were taken in the course of working with him or he would sometimes ask me to join him when a picture with guests was taken and only on a few occasions some of his friends asked that I be included in a photo. But that was precisely one of the reasons why I lasted with him for so long. I never allowed familiarity or opportunity for photographs to distract from how he wanted me to behave. At one point he asked whether it was the case that I didn't want to have my photograph taken with him and I laughed it off and had to assure him that was not the case. This behaviour by them now was totally unacceptable to me.

I eventually arrived in the Eastern Cape on the Friday, together with Josina, some of her family and friends, via the private plane organized by Faizal and Malaika Motlekar. When we landed in Umtata I noticed how lush and green the hills were. It had been raining heavily and still continued to rain, which is something that would have really pleased Madiba and I so wish he could have seen it. He was happy when the soils of his soul were adequately watered and became fertile for grazing and farming. In an interview with Robyn Curnow from CNN, one of his grandsons told the story of how he and Madiba were sitting in the living room of his Qunu house and Madiba urged Mbuso, his young grandson, to go and run naked in the rain. Madiba said that's what he used to do when he was young. He loved life unconditionally despite what life handed him time and time again. Just imagine eighty years ago – a young Nelson Mandela frolicking in these same hills. Naked, unencumbered by the past and unknowing about his future. Perhaps the rain was a fitting way for him to come home.

Driving from the airport I was reminded how I made him smile whenever we were in Qunu and I greeted him by his circumcision name: ‘Ahhh Dalibhunga!’ The Afrikaans girl was greeting him in his Xhosa name; he was entertained by that and it usually brought about the biggest smile on his face.

We passed a few cattle and I reminisced about his adoration for his cattle. We used to drive on his farm, going out to see the cows and bulls and secretly I think he would have loved to have been a big cattle farmer. He often told me that a man’s wealth in their tradition was measured by the number of cattle he had. He had between thirty and sixty cattle at any given point and I would respond: ‘Oh Khulu so you are very rich!’ and he would laugh.

His easy accessibility, his natural affinity with people was what I remembered. My main role during my years with him was to be his protector – the shield – the person who had to protect him from being smothered with love by others. His openness seemed at odds with the closed nature of the funeral arrangements. It confused me, it saddened me and it even embarrassed me.

The world’s media had descended on Qunu. I was reminded how fond Madiba was of journalists and seeing them made me think that he would really be impressed to see so many of them in Qunu and how boastful he would be about his little village to them. He used to call them often, whenever a journalist wrote an article about him that was critical in nature. He would invite them to a meal and at first they assumed they were in trouble for being critical of him. But they soon learned after arrival at his house for a meal that he merely wanted to engage with them to get an understanding of their criticism. The journalists would often leave not having changed their minds, but Madiba didn’t attempt to change their minds. He would have an informed opinion after having engaged with them, and even though he occasionally changed an opinion by offering correct information, they never parted feeling hostile. Seeing so many familiar faces in Qunu made me think of many such occasions and how he courted them with his charm. He loved sharing information with the media and appreciated the fact that they had a job to do. This set-up was so different – the media being kept away and information withheld as a show of where power resided.

* * *

On Sunday we woke up at 4 a.m. to get ready for the funeral. I tried to manoeuvre a plan to get George Bizos to the house so that he didn't have to get into a bus. He is old and struggles to walk. He is frail. Ironically again, one of Madiba's ex-bodyguards, Piet Erwee, helped us to get him there, fighting us through the roadblocks and police checkpoints, without any accreditation himself but paying his last dues to Madiba. Piet was employed by Rory Steyn, his ex-police commander and one of Madiba's close confidant bodyguards from his Presidential days. Rory now has a very successful security company and his story is another of how you become successful as long as you serve your passion in life.

Arriving in Qunu it was only proper that George Bizos would go to the house and greet the family. We entered through the kitchen door as they locked the front door and refused us access. Makaziwe's daughter was standing on the inside shouting that the door would not be opened for anyone no matter who. I led Advocate Bizos and his son through the kitchen door at the back and through the dining room. Makaziwe passed and barely greeted us. As Madiba became more frail it was clear that they didn't approve of his choices. Not in staff and not in friends. And such was George Bizos. Makaziwe had challenged his appointment as trustee to one of Madiba's trusts earlier in the year and a public mud-slinging followed in which Makaziwe's daughter insulted and belittled Advocate Bizos. None of us were welcomed in the house.

We greeted her in a civilized manner and she walked into the kitchen. In the kitchen I could see her making a determined turn around and she stormed back into the dining room. 'Zelda we don't want you people here. Now that Uncle George is here, he can stay but we don't want you people here.' I responded by saying: 'I am happy to oblige Makaziwe if someone could just give us direction of what to do with people like Uncle George.' She repeated her instructions: 'We don't want you people in the house.' Isaac was watching and I turned around and left. Uncle George and his son walked past her and went into the lounge where others gathered.

Shortly after us Tokyo Sexwale, an ex-colleague of Madiba's from Robben Island who had served in Madiba's government, arrived and he was also shown the door. Tokyo's appointment by Madiba as trustee on the same trust that George Bizos served was also questioned by Makaziwe; he too was aligned with the wrong side of the family. These people were appointed by Madiba to serve on his trusts for a

very good reason. When he became ill and unable to speak for himself the family started challenging his decisions and it was clear that once he was gone, they were going to do that on all fronts. It was also clear that if you were friends or aligned with anyone outside Makaziwe or Ndileka's camp you were not welcome in the house. I was not the only one to be chased out.

I found it difficult and emotionally challenging to reconcile his last years and what we had experienced for sixteen-odd years with what was happening now. To say it was in complete contrast would be putting it mildly.

Qunu is a valley-like community sunk between the majestic mountains in the Eastern Cape. Madiba's farm itself is small but in comparison to that of his neighbours quite lavish. Although the house he and Mrs Machel built in the early 2000s is in stark contrast to the living standards of the surrounding area it is modest in comparison to those of people of similar or close stature. The huge dome erected for his funeral first shocked me. It wasn't just a big tent but a dome, probably the size of a small aircraft hanger. I heard that the dome had been stored away for years to have it ready when the 'life event' occurred. It had been bought from Germany, I learned, and thought that it was probably only Madiba's funeral that could get away with something like that being bought from Europe; the unions would have argued that it could have been a perfect job-creation opportunity to have it made in South Africa. Many years ago we had bought t-shirts in bulk from the East for one of Madiba's campaigns and got a good lashing from the media and public for not supporting the South African textile industry. I guess the funeral was different. From the house to the dome was probably a good 1.5 km. The road that connected the house to the dome was a simple gravel road. To take either the front road or the back road towards the dome one got a pretty good sense of the size of the property and you saw the cows Madiba was so proud of.

I started making my way up to the dome where the funeral was to take place and simply kept Madiba in my thoughts and heart. He would not have approved of the fact that I had been asked to leave the house. He would not have approved of the ostentatiousness of this huge dome on his farm. A few years ago when he was able to take decisions and voice them himself he insisted I be in the house with them for the final ceremony when Makgatho passed away. Now I was being excluded because he could no longer insist on my presence. On

occasion Madiba chased people out of the house, as recently as in December 2009 and regardless that I joined in trying to convince him to be more lenient to them; his voice had been silenced.

In these trying times, I had to remember some of Madiba's greatest lessons . . . my relationship was with him and no one can ever remove that from me. People die, relationships don't die and my relationship with Madiba will never die.

Arriving at the dome – where more people were gathering, shepherded in buses from Umtata, almost an hour's drive away – I heard that Oprah's bus had not been allowed onto the premises. We had had great difficulty obtaining landing rights for her plane in Umtata as only heads of state's planes were allowed to land there. It was understandable – until I heard that exceptions had been made already for other planes to land there too. The bus she took from the Umtata airport was not accredited to enter the farm and she was offloaded at the main house. She had to walk up to the dome on the dusty roads, past the cows. Rory, Madiba's ex-bodyguard, managed to get a minister's car to transport her and her delegation the rest of the way to the dome. She had visited Qunu twice before and the last time she joined us and hosted a Christmas children's party for more than 25,000 children in the village and surrounding area. Madiba had also asked her to build a school once, as part of his school-building project, and she established the Oprah Winfrey Academy close to Johannesburg. One of a kind in private schools in South Africa. Madiba had great appreciation for her and her support for underprivileged children in South Africa. He was also entertained by her wealth and repeatedly told people about her generosity to buy all the attendees at her show cars. He would end the sentence with: 'can you imagine that?'

While Oprah, Stedman, Forest and Gayle were making their way to the dome, I tried to find seats for Advocate Bizos, Richard Branson and others. Whenever someone arrived at the door that I knew I ushered them to an area where Bridgette Radebe and her brother Patrice kept open seats for Madiba's friends.

Mum was still in the main house, getting ready to accompany Madiba up to the dome and his final resting place. I could see on footage the day before that she was brutally exhausted. They were preparing Madiba for his final journey up the hill on his beloved farm in Qunu.

Once I had managed to seat all the guests I felt responsible for I

couldn't find a seat myself, unless I was prepared to go and sit among the military people who were part of the proceedings. I was too ashamed because I was so emotional so I left and found a spot on the grass outside to sit close to Robyn Curnow, my friend who was reporting for CNN from inside the premises. From there I could hear the proceedings on a SABC speaker and see visuals on a close-by screen attached to the back of a satellite truck. The hearse arrived – with Madiba's coffin on the back of a gun carriage, draped in the South African flag. There was more irony. I was outside and even though I felt shut out, there were very few people left outside and it strangely provided another almost personal opportunity to say goodbye. When the military procession moved past, I couldn't breathe from the sobbing. At first I saw Mandla in the front of the military vehicle, still guarding his grandfather, and after Madiba passed Mum's car followed and I could see her through the window. I so badly wanted to hold her to give her comfort, but also for her to hold me. Madiba was afforded full military honours for his funeral, which meant that all or any ceremony and protocol from the military applied to his burial.

A furore about Archbishop Desmond Tutu's attendance at the funeral played off in the media 48 hours before the event. He was shunned as no proper arrangements were communicated to him. When he arrived at the dome with Trevor Manuel I could see his own pain and sadness. I hugged him for as long as time allowed. I wanted to console him but I also wanted consolation from him. Madiba was so fond of him.

A stranger, a black man, saw me shivering from pain and walked up to me, put his arms around me and said 'Zelda don't worry sisi [sister], it will get better.' I felt like collapsing in his arms but I knew that I had to compose myself and thanked him with a hug. Weeks after I tried to recall this man's face, tried to remember who it was and whether I could trace him again. I wanted to thank him again for doing that. It wasn't just a hug and trying to console me. He genuinely cared. It touched my inner core when strangers, black people reached out to me in this way. How far we had come!

The service started and the stage was beautifully decorated with ninety-five big candles, one for each of Madiba's years. I should have been able to just pay my respects and pray. But I was worried about admin again – and particularly about how we would get Oprah and her delegation back to the house. Rich and famous and people I've

never seen or heard of in nineteen years were given accreditation to the burial site. Only 400 of the 4,000 guests were accredited to go to the burial site. I was shown what the accreditation cards looked like but I was not given one.

Ahmed Kathrada, Madiba's long-time friend from prison, delivered the most moving speech during the ceremony. He paid tribute to Madiba and said Madiba had joined the ANC A-team in heaven. He was so emotional and it was sad to see him like that. Kathy, as we fondly refer to him, had been friends with Madiba since before his imprisonment. They spent eighteen years together on Robben Island in addition to the time in Pollsmoor after being moved from the island.

Soon the ceremony was over – speech after speech. Some of the speakers were touching while others wanted to make sure they basked for the last time in Madiba's bright light. The only thing that really reminded me of Madiba was the song sung by children. 'Rolihlahla Mandela' is a song written to Madiba, and Mrs Machel asked Mbongeni Ngema, a prominent South African artist, to record the song with children the week prior to the funeral. Madiba's infectious smile was vivid in my mind when I heard it. I could so well imagine his liveliness at the sound of these voices. But that was all gone now. This and the 95 candles in the dome depicting Madiba's life were the only requests from Madiba's widow that were adhered to.

While waiting for the proceedings to come to an end I read the obituary in great detail. None of the Mandela legacy institutions that Madiba personally created were mentioned in any obituary, tribute or vote of thanks. As if they never existed.

People started making their way to the burial site. People walked past me, many of Madiba's friends and of course all the family. Some of Madiba's friends asked whether I was not going to the site and I told them that I had not been accredited. Some of Madiba's friends wanted me to put up a fight to get access. I knew that I had said my goodbyes. My relationship with Madiba was not defined by whether I stood next to his grave or not. It was way, way more than that. Rory Steyn, who was looking after Oprah during the funeral, joined me and Robyn outside. Robyn, Rory and I, three white South Africans whose lives had been changed by Madiba's leadership and personal love, stood together and watched the proceedings on the screen. My relationship with Madiba was not about being at his side at key moments in his life. It was defined in the ordinary moments I spent with him. Rory, Robyn and I held each other and knew this was a

moment in history where we were on the frontlines. Saying goodbye in person to a great man in our respective ways, our Khulu, our Tata and our Madiba.

We were standing watching the proceedings on the screen and when the twenty-one-gun salutes were fired it sounded like a barrage of tears into the sky. And the fly-past, helicopters with South African flags flying in unison, low over the hills of Qunu, followed by the fighter jets. The sound of those machines shuddered through my body. It finally sank in. It was over. I burst into loud tears, sobbing on Robyn's shoulder while Rory was holding both of us, consoling us while we shivered from pain. The tears cascaded down my face again. Robyn was not on air at the time and she was just being my friend, but unknown to both of us, her microphone was still connected live. My gasping sobs were heard on CNN across the world as pictures of his last journey were aired. Robyn says the studio in Atlanta shouted in her earpiece, 'The microphone is hot!' She knew my tearful breakdown had been broadcast to millions of people. I didn't. At the same time she felt the dilemma of letting me go. She knew she couldn't let go of me and held on even tighter, consoling me. A few minutes later she stepped back to the camera and described the scene around her and mentioned the powerful sense of departure and sadness, her eyes clearly red from crying with us. She described how I, Madiba's longtime assistant, had burst into tears, explaining to all those listening who had been the person crying. It was only two weeks later that she told me what had happened and what she had reported. I didn't feel betrayed. I needed my two friends Rory and Robyn to hold my heart together from falling apart. I felt I wanted to share my pain with the world and unknown to me I had, but at the same time I have never felt so lonely. I was haunted by loss and the emptiness made me convulse.

They were still busy at the gravesite when I started making my way back to Madiba's house. I had to get home. First to the hotel and then I was determined to get back to Johannesburg as fast as possible. I couldn't take any more and I needed to be home, alone with my dogs. I'd walked halfway down to the house when one of Madiba's bodyguards, Sam, gave me lift in a golf cart. I cannot imagine what I looked like but as we drove past familiar faces, people who had served Madiba in different capacities noticed me on the back of the cart, stopped the cart and had a few words. I felt like a bag of washed out clothes. I had no energy left in my body and I no longer controlled

any of my emotions. Old ANC colleagues of Madiba's who were all sidelined or withheld from going to the burial site stopped me to chat. I was tempted to go into the house to have a last look at the empty yellow chair in Madiba's lounge but I was rushing to find transport and decided that today was not a good day to expose myself to more sorrow. I knew I would be back soon.

By the time I left, I had managed to arrange transport for Oprah and her delegation from the dome back to the house where they would find their bus. Richard Branson was sorted and I left transport behind for Advocate Bizos. There was nothing else I could fix. I had made sure everyone was OK and it was time to let go. I left for the hotel and got into bed with my funeral clothes still on. I was depleted in every possible way. I slept for two hours and when I woke I learned that my dearest colleague, Yase, had managed to change my flight to enable me to return to Johannesburg the same night. He just grasped that I wanted silence and solitude and pulled out all stops to change my flight. And so I drove the 260 km in rain to East London where I got the plane back to Johannesburg. I got home after 1 a.m. and it took me some time to fall asleep.

* * *

The next few days were spent on paying accounts. The funeral was merely ten days before Christmas and suppliers had to pay staff before the holidays.

I had the rest of my root canal work done, attended Douw Steyn's sixty-first birthday dinner, which was somewhat of a sombre affair as he was also ill at the time, and had some other physical problems attended to that manifested themselves as a result of all the stress of the previous week. In June I thought I had sustained an injury during a gym session at around the same time Madiba was hospitalized. I constantly had a pain in my hip and sometimes it crossed over down into my knee. No matter how I stretched or how many painkillers I took, I couldn't get rid of the pain. On 19 December I woke up in the morning thinking that I had become paralysed. Both my legs were numb. I could feel the same pain in my hip as before but my upper legs were both numb. I called a physio friend back from holiday to help me as I was desperate. After much treatment she managed to get rid of all the spasms I had been walking around with since June. As was the case over the years, whenever Madiba suffered physical

distress, the stress and worry that caused me also manifested itself physically in my body.

Finally on Friday, 20 December I made my way back to Umtata. I wanted to go and say my last goodbye and pay my respects at Madiba's gravesite. In the days prior to this trip I had wondered much about the meaning of life, about mortality, and even though we did not discuss it much, as he considered it a very personal matter, what Madiba really believed about life and death. We tried to shelter Mrs Machel from as much as possible over the preceding two weeks but she knew I hadn't been there when he was buried. I was not the only one who wasn't allowed at the burial. Meme, the housekeeper, and Betty, one of the household assistants, had also been pulled out of a row and were prevented from going to the grave, or even being in the foyer of Madiba's house when the casket Arrived from Johannesburg, yet they too had been loyally serving him for years.

The hills of Qunu were back to the slow pace of life. The dome had been removed and sprinklers watered the newly planted grass where the dome was previously erected. The cows and goats were roaming freely as before, unaffected by the change in life. I went straight to the farm to greet Mrs Machel. This would be the first time I had seen her since the Thursday before the burial.

I wanted to know specifics from her about his burial. Did he go in one of his favourite shirts? She said he didn't. It wasn't one of his favourites. He went with some of his personal items, some of the few things that were so dear to him. I asked about his walking stick. An ivory stick he got from Douw Steyn made from the tusks of a bull elephant that had died on Douw's farm Shambala, where Douw had built a house for Madiba to use to write the sequel of Long Walk to Freedom. Sadly but not surprisingly I was told that the stick had not been found. I took time with Mum talking about the stick, tracking its journey to the house in Qunu and then to Houghton where we last saw it. Neither of us had the energy or the emotional strength to start looking for the stick and I put her mind to rest that the stick will eventually one day surface, and hopefully one of us will still be alive. Or someone will read this and discover it perhaps. It is clearly marked 'To Madiba, from Douw Steyn' and one of its kind. A solid white ivory walking stick. Madiba should have left with it.

Driving back after 10 p.m. from Qunu to Umtata that night, the most beautiful moon rose over the hills of Umtata. The brightest orange moon I had ever seen. It dawned upon me that here this white

Afrikaner girl was driving from Qunu to Umtata all by herself. Madiba would have insisted that security accompany me, being concerned for my safety. Thinking about that made me smile. But I kept my eye on the moon and realized that he had removed all fear from me. I had finally grown up. Almost twenty years ago I wouldn't have dreamt of driving this road by myself at night. But the Transkei, as it was formerly known, gets under your skin. The place becomes part of you. I was fearful of so much twenty years ago – of life, of black people, of this black man and the future of South Africa – and now I was no longer persuaded or influenced by mainstream thinking or fears. I was my own person. Madiba had given me peace and freedom too. He had freed me from the shackles of my own fears. He not only liberated the black man but the white man too. I felt light, free and thankful that my teacher was Nelson Mandela. As much as I grieved for him, I had gained so much and I spoke to him in the car on my way back to Umtata, keeping my eye on the bright moon.

We ended up going to the grave on Sunday morning. We were scheduled to leave around midday. Shortly after 8 a.m. Mum, Josina, Meme, Betty and a few other workers, security and I drove up to the burial site. We had ordered fresh flowers the previous day and we started cleaning the graves of Madiba and his three children. We were quiet and the mood was solemn. The tombstones all had the family crest on them, that which had become familiar to me through its appearance on the House of Mandela wines. We removed the old flowers, bunches of white flowers that had been laid on his coffin and placed around the tombstone, orchids and roses. Now scattered in the wind and damaged by the sun. We replaced the flowers with fresh ones, after which Mum called us together and she asked Meme to pray. Meme said a beautiful prayer and I was shuddering as we were holding hands during it. Meme prayed in Sotho as well, during which my thoughts went off to Afrikaans prayers and my mind wandered, trying to send a message to Madiba. I thanked him again and told him like so many other times how much I appreciated him but that, most importantly, he should remember that I love him.

* * *

Shortly after noon it was wheels up from the Umtata airport. It was the longest fifty-five-minute flight from Umtata to Johannesburg of our lives. It was all over. Final. And the next chapter would be harder.

I knew that a battle was brewing over the will and Madiba's estate and control over his legacy. It was like they say, a sign of the times. I knew that it was also time for me to start moving away. My duty was done. The last days and months reminded me of the story of Tolstoy. Ironically there were a lot of similarities to the life of that great Russian writer whose work Madiba also loved so much. How crowds gathered before his death, but also the contest for control over his legacy and his estate.

I was seated closest to the door in the small aircraft, facing the back of the plane. It was much better and more convenient than a commercial plane but we all felt somehow exposed, naked, as there was nowhere to hide our emotions. I could feel Mum's pain as I watched her breaking down in tears when our plane slowly made its way through the thick clouds. And eventually we all just broke down, crying in our seats. Me, Mum, Josina, Celina – Mrs Machel's sister-in-law – Betty and Cordier the bodyguard. No one spoke during the flight.

Mum is normally so stoic, so strong. But breaking through the clouds, flying away from him, leaving him alone we all shared a sense of abandoning him, deserting him. The only thing we never wanted him to feel and the one thing I promised him I would never do. But what do we do now? He is home and heroes never die. He will be present in those beautiful hills for ever and I now know he will be even more powerful in death than he was in life.

His image, his legacy must be protected.

I don't know what I will do for the rest of my life. His prolonged illness had forced me to grow up. It has taught me some of the most valuable lessons of life and showed me what not to expect of people. Madiba did not only unify a country once again even through his illness and in death, but he taught us more than we ever bargained for. I will allow life to take its course with me and I now know that I will always be at the place where I am supposed to be at any given point in time. I have no plans other than annually honouring him through Bikers for Mandela Day. Maybe I will find another job and perhaps I will find a man to spend time with, one who knows and will respect that a piece of my heart has already been taken . . . given to an old black man who was once my people's enemy and is now lying, like an ancient King, deep in the soil of South Africa's golden hills of Qunu.

We will see him in every sunset and every sunrise. We must keep

looking for him. He will look after us if we remember his lessons.

And slowly we climbed above the clouds, reaching the sunshine and the warm light of the African sun shining through the windows of the plane, eventually heating up our faces and drying away the tears. Whatever happens now, I know we did our best.

Tot weersiens Khulu! Until we meet again.

To be continued . . .

13

Tot weersiens, Khulu!

Daar is ’n toneel in die rolprent *Long Walk to Freedom* waar die karakter van Nelson Mandela stadig teen ’n heuwel in Qunu op loop. Sy rug is op die kamera gekeer soos hy wegstap. Die lig is sag en sy bekende stappie beweeg teen ’n ligte helling op. Ek het geweet dis nie hy nie. Dit was Idris Elba, ’n Britse akteur, maar die beeld was so kragtig en so treffend en so hartverskeurend dat ek in die rolprentteater in trane uitgebars het. Die trane wou nie ophou vloei nie, en op ’n manier wat ek dit nog nooit voorheen ervaar het nie. Dit het eenvoudig teen my wange af gestroom, onbeheerbaar. Dit het nie gehelp dat ek probeer ophou nie. Daardie aand nadat ek *Long Walk to Freedom* by die première in Suid-Afrika gesien het, het ek myself ook aan die slaap gehuil, iets wat ek in drie-en-veertig jaar nooit gedoen het nie. Dit was asof ek voortydig in rou was. Ek het geweet Madiba was amper nie meer met ons nie. Dat hy in pyn verkeer het. Maar hierdie rolprentweergawe van sy lewe het deur alles gesny en my so baie aan hom herinner.

Madiba het nooit kans gekry om die fliek te sien nie. Dis in November 2013 uitgereik toe hy naby sy einde was. Dit is ’n storie waarvoor hy byna twee dekades vroeër sy seën gegee het. Die vervaardiger, Anant Singh, het die regte gekoop om Madiba se

lewensverhaal uit te beeld en dit het twintig jaar geneem voordat die storie die silwerdoek gehaal het, net betyds om ons opnuut aan sy verhaal te herinner.

Nie net herinner die fliek ons aan Madiba se opofferings nie, maar dit herinner my ook aan 'n jonger, gesonder Nelson Mandela. Sy liggaam was nou so gebroke, so beskadig en het so agteruitgegaan, maar in die fliek was hy sterk, fors en vol lewe. Hy was lief vir dans – nie die geskoffel van sy later jare toe sy knie al ingegee het nie, maar die jazz en bop van die 1950's. Madiba het ons vertel hoe hy in Sophiatown gaan dans het, en danksy die rolprent kon ek nou prentjies by daardie stories voeg. Ons sou gereeld tydens middag- of aandete op ons oorsese reise sit, net die twee van ons, en hy sou graag die besonderhede van sy vroeë lewe met my deel, en in my het hy die volmaakte gehoor gehad. Dit was nooit vir my moeilik om my verbeelding op loop te laat gaan met 'n storie nie en ek sou hom uitvra oor hoe hy gelyk het, hoe hy hom voorgedoen het, die klere wat hy aangehad het, of hy met meisies flankeer het en hoe dit was om te dans. My reguit vrae was vir hom amusant en ek het gereeld gevra: 'Het vroue oor hulle voete geval om met u te kan dans?' en hy sou lag en effens skaam spog en sê: 'Ja, natuurlik!' En dan sou ons al twee uitbars van die lag.

'n Paar dae nadat ek die rolprent gesien het, is aan my gesê daar is geen verbetering in Madiba se toestand nie. Dit was ses maande nadat hy in Junie in die hospitaal opgeneem is. Ek het 'n paar maande gelede al opgehou om hom te besoek. Mevrou Machel het my eendag na die huis toe genooi vir tee nadat Madiba ontslaan is, hoewel sy toestand nog as kritiek maar stabiel beskou is. Sy het gesê sy weet hoe lief ek hom het en dat sy nie gedink het dit sou goed wees vir my om sy agteruitgang te aanskou nie. Aan die begin het ek vermoed die familie het vir haar gesê hulle wil nie hê ek moet hom weer sien nie, maar nadat ek daaroor nagedink het, was ek bly dit het gebeur. Ek wou hom nie in 'n magtelose toestand sien nie. Ek wou nie beheer oor my emosies voor hom verloor nie. Dit was eers na sy dood dat ek verneem het dat ek inderdaad belet is om hom te sien.

Dit was 'n onophoudelike stryd in my gedagtes soos ek probeer het om te verstaan hoekom hy nie net laat gaan het nie en of hy in staat sou wees om homself te laat gaan. Dit spook by 'n mens, dit eet elke

dag aan jou, stukkie vir stukkie. Die feit dat jy nie weet nie en nie verstaan wat met hom gebeur nie.

By tye het ek soos baie Suid-Afrikaners gewonder of hy kunsmatig aan die lewe gehou word. Maar mevrou Machel en Josina het vir my gesê daar was nog steeds 'n vonk, dat Madiba soms nog iemand se hand vasgehou of sy oë oopgemaak het. Maar teen November het selfs dit nie meer gebeur nie. Hy was besig om weg te glip ondanks oorweldigende pogings om hom aan die lewe te hou.

Sy dokters het gedink dis ongelooflik dat hy soveel krag gehad het, selfs in sy swakheid. En ek het gereeld gewonder of hy nou bang was om dood te gaan. Hy was altyd so ongeërg oor die dood en het goed gesê soos wanneer jy weg is, is jou liggaam dood. Mense sou oor sy voorvaders praat wat hom nog nie geroep het nie en ek het gewonder of hy hiervan bewus was. Hy het respek vir die tradisies gehad, maar hy was nie obsessief daaroor nie.

Soos die dae verbygegaan het, was ek permanent op bystand, angstig terwyl ek wag vir nuus oor sy gesondheid. Uiteindelik bring 'n mens jou lewe in 'n soort wagkamer deur. Ek, mevrou Machel en Josina het vir mekaar teksboodskappe gestuur omdat ons so besorg was. Soms het ek hulle ontmoet en probeer om my pligte soos gewoonlik na te kom en ek sou nie te veel vrae vra nie, behalwe 'hoe gaan dit met hom?' of 'Mum, dink u hy verduur enige pyn?' of 'Mum, dink u hy weet wat om hom aangaan?' Ek het ook probeer om een persoon te wees wat nie die heeltyd oor hom uitvra nie en eerder my steun aan hom te toon deur haar te ondersteun. Hy het immers die eerste dag toe ek haar in Parys ontmoet het, in 1996, vir my gesê ek moet na haar omsien en altyd 'n ogie oor haar hou. Ek was steeds besig om dit te doen.

En toe het die boodskap gekom wat ek geweet het onafwendbaar was. Op 3 Desember het Mum en Josina my laat weet Madiba se toestand was besig om te versleg. Dit het na die begin van die einde gelyk.

Ek het Josina op Donderdag 5 Desember by die stigting gesien. Sy het uitgeput gelyk.

Sy het my daarna vroegaand gebel met instruksies van mevrou Machel. Ek moes van Madiba se beste vriende inlig dat dinge besig was om te versleg. Dit was so moeilik. So wreedaardig reguit. Dit het

my ure geneem om almal op my lys in die hande te kry. Dit was mense soos emeritus-aartsbiskop Desmond Tutu, Ahmed Kathrada, Thabo Mbeki, George Bizos en ook ander mense wat na aan Madiba was, maar wat buite die regeringstrukture was en wat nie normaalweg in sulke omstandighede ingelig sou word nie. Ek was sterk toe ek die oproepe begin maak, maar hul reaksie, ’n mengsel van pyn, skok en ongeloof, het die sterk gees waarmee ek begin het, verwoes. Na elke oproep moes ek myself regruk en onthou wat Madiba gesê het: ‘Dit lyk altyd onmoontlik tot dit gedoen is.’ Dan sou ek die volgende persoon bel.

Later die aand het twee militêre helikopters gevaarlik laag oor my huis gevlieg. Aangesien ek tussen Pretoria, die basis waar militêre helikopters gestasioneer is, en Johannesburg, waar Madiba se huis was, gebly het, moes die helikopters oor my voorstad vlieg. Was die militêre gemeenskap besig om vir die ergste voor te berei? Of het dit klaar gebeur? As dit militêr van aard was, het dit beteken dat dit gebeur het. Daar was twee vraagstukke om te oorweeg: In die eerste plek het hulle waarskynlik betrokke geraak omdat protokol dit vereis het, en in die tweede plek het ek gedink dat hulle die ‘nag van die lang messe’ of ‘uhuru’ gevrees het. Daar is gesê swart mense sou wit mense vermoor die aand nadat Madiba tot sterwe gekom het. Dit was net die ekstremiste wat by sulke praatjies betrokke geraak het en ek het teen dié tyd geweet Suid-Afrika is sterker en as ’n nasie beter toegerus vir dit wat wit en swart gevrees het: Madiba se dood.

En toe was dit verby. Ek het net geweet hy was weg. Dit was nie nodig vir my om te vra nie. Ek was ’n paar minute verlam, en toe het ek van my stoel by die tafel opgespring omdat ek gedink het dit sal keer dat ek histeries raak. Ek het buitetoe gegaan en in stilte in die warm somernag gesit en net gedink, gebid en probeer om dit wat gebeur het toe te laat om tot my deur te dring. Ek was alleen by die huis en my eerste instink was dat ek moes bid, kerse aansteek en dan so gou moontlik in die bed klim. Ek het geweet wat voorlê. My foon het waansinnig begin lui. Ek het nie geantwoord nie en gerugte het begin loop. Omtrent twee uur later het ek boodskappe begin ontvang van so ver weg as Los Angeles. Is alles in die haak met Madiba? Ek het geweet as ek een vraag sou beantwoord, sou dit soos ’n veldbrand versprei. Ek wou ook nie jok nie.

My foon het aanhoudend gelui en ek het besluit om die klank af te skakel. Ek het twee slaappille gedrink en in die bed geklim. Ek het geweet president Zuma moes ’n amptelike aankondiging maak, maar ek het geen idee gehad wanneer dit gedoen sou word nie. Ek het vir die uitvoerende hoof van die Nelson Mandela-stigting, Sello Hatang, gesê dat ek hom graag die volgende oggend sesuur by die kantoor sou wou sien. Hy het ingestem en ek het aan die slaap geraak.

Voor dit het ek ’n boodskap aan my broer en sy lewensmaat, Rick, gestuur en hulle gevra om my honde vroeg die volgende oggend op te laai. Ek het gesê: ‘Moet asseblief nie enige vrae vra nie, kom haal net vir Winston en Indira so vroeg as moontlik.’ Iemand sou na hulle moes omsien en ek het geweet ek sou die volgende paar dae nie baie tyd by die huis deurbring nie.

Op 6 Desember 2013 het ek net na vieruur die oggend wakker geword. Ek het agt-en-twintig oproepe gemis en letterlik honderde e-posse, teksboodskappe en ander boodskappe. Ek het gaan stort en toe ek ondertoe is vir koffie, het ek deur ’n paar van die boodskappe gelees. Die wêreld het my met my ergste nagmerrie wakker gemaak. Madiba was weg. Die president het die nuus in die middernagtelike ure bekend gemaak en tot vandag toe het ek nie die beeldmateriaal van daardie aankondiging gesien nie.

Ek het my ouers voor sesuur gebel. Hulle het toe reeds daarvan gehoor. Hulle slaap met die radio in hulle kamer aan en toe die gewone musiek deur die president se aankondiging onderbreek is, het my pa my ma wakker gemaak. My pa, die man wat my gewaarsku het teen die terroris se vrylating in 1990, het soos ’n kind oor Madiba gehuil en die hele nag gekyk hoe gebeure op televisie ontvou. Toe ek in my ouers se stemme oor die telefoon hoor hoe hartseer hulle is, het ek vir die eerste keer gehuil.

Ek is inderhaas kantoor toe en ’n paar van my kollegas was reeds daar. Almal was emosioneel, maar ons het onsself reggeruk en soos soldate op die slagveld vorentoe gebeur in die wete dat ons aan die werk moes spring om op die volgende paar dae voor te berei. Ons moes meegevoelboeke koop, ons moes verklarings voorberei en ons moes ruimte vir die publiek skep om oor Madiba se dood te treur. Die personeel onder Sello se leierskap was briljant en hulle het daardie ruimte in ’n japtrap geskep. Ek het ook een van my vriendinne, Minèe,

gevra om na ons kantoor toe te kom om na die fone om te sien en oproepe te antwoord. Ek het hulp nodig gehad om die bedrywigheid op die fone onder beheer te hou. Die media was op my spoor vir een of ander reaksie en Minèe moes die druk van my neem terwyl ek probeer uitwerk wat ek volgende moes doen. Ek het besluit om ’n verklaring uit te reik sodat die druk van die media op my kon verslap. Terwyl ek voor my rekenaar sit, het woorde en trane tegelykertyd begin vloei.

Die Nelson Mandela-stigting het ingestem om my verklaring uit te reik. Daarin het ek geskryf:

> Ek moes gereeld onder meedoënlose druk sukkel. Maar dan kyk ek na hom wat die lewe met soveel grasie en energie bewandel het. Ek het nooit weggegaan nie. Ek kon nie. Nelson Mandela het nie op lojaliteit aangedring nie, maar hy het diepe, onwrikbare lojaliteit geïnspireer by almal wie se lewe hy aangeraak het. En nou, terwyl ons Madiba se afskeid betreur, begin ek stelselmatig die feit verwerk dat ek hom nooit weer sal sien nie. Maar helde is onsterflik. So hartseer as wat dit my maak om te dink dat ek nooit weer by ’n vertrek sal instap en sy oorvloedige, aansteeklike glimlag sien of hom hoor sê ‘O, Zeldina, jy’s hier’ nie, het ek die feit aanvaar dat Madiba se nalatenskap nie op sy teenwoordigheid berus nie, maar sal voortleef in alles wat na hom vernoem is, ook in boeke, beelde en rolprente. Dit sal voortleef in hoe ons voel wanneer ons sy naam hoor, in respek en liefde en die eenheid wat hy in ons as ’n land geïnspireer het, maar veral ook hoe ons met mekaar omgaan … Ek sal elke glimlag koester, die genotvolle maar ook die moeilike tye asook my kaalvoet-oomblikke … Tot weersiens, Khulu, ek sal jou liefhê tot die einde van my dae.

Die werklikheid van alles het my getref toe ek die laaste sin tik. Ek was besig om totsiens te sê. Het hierdie dinge regtig gebeur? Ek het my nooit, ooit verbeel dat ek by my lessenaar sou sit en hierdie woorde tik nie en het gevoel asof ek dit uit ’n ander stratosfeer sê. Minèe het oproepe ontvang en boodskappe namens my beantwoord. Mense het na my uitgereik uit ’n persoonlike perspektief omdat hulle geweet het hoe baie hy vir my beteken, maar ander sou ook, wel, omdat ek hul skakel met Madiba was. Hulle het nie geweet hoe of waar hulle die hartseer oor hul verlies kon uitdruk nie. Ek moes eers besluit wat gedoen moes word voor ek oor my eie gevoelens kon nadink.

Vir ’n geruime tyd voor sy dood het ek saam met mevrou Machel en Josina gewerk om lyste vir hierdie gebeurlikheid op te stel. Dit het mense ingesluit wat vir Madiba gewerk het, mense wat tydens die Rivonia-hoogverraadverhoor by hom was, vriende, hoofde en trustees van al sy liefdadighede, ondersteuners en hulle na wie ons altyd kon gaan wanneer Madiba iets nodig gehad het, nie net vir sy liefdadighede nie, maar ook as hy werk gesoek het vir een van sy

kleinkinders of om ’n kind met iets spesifiek te help. Die lyste is gereeld op datum gebring en die mees onlangse een is in Junie 2013 opgedateer toe Madiba in die hospitaal opgeneem is. Die lyste is daarna deur mevrou Machel aan Makaziwe en Ndileka Mandela, Madiba se oudste kleinkind, voorgelê. Hulle was die enigste twee familielede wat betrokke was by die begrafnisreëlings en hulle het die begrafnis al die afgelope agt jaar beplan.

Die staat het oorspronklik beplan om die begrafnis by die Uniegebou, die middelpunt van mag in Suid-Afrika, te hou en die plek waar alle ander staatsbegrafnisse in die geskiedenis gehou is, hoewel Madiba in Qunu begrawe wou word, maar nie spesifiek gesê het hy wou ’n staatsbegrafnis daar hê nie. Hy was ’n eenvoudige man met beskeie verwagtinge wat om een of ander rede sy belangrikheid in die wêreld onderskat het.

Hierdie begrafnis sou ’n magstryd wees oor wie die Mandela-nalatenskap beheer en oor rolle in die Mandela-familie.

Ek was dankbaar oor hulle wat my onthou het en die klein rolletjie wat ek in Madiba se lewe gespeel het. Emeritus-aartsbiskop Desmond Tutu het my genoem in ’n baie aandoenlike preek in die St. George-katedraal in Kaapstad. Maar as ’n nederige aanmaning van die feit dat ons almal vergeet en vervang kan word, het hy my van vergeet en my keer op keer Zelda van Graan genoem. Hy was ook besig om oud te word. Broos en ontsteld oor die heengaan van die man vir wie hy respek gehad het. Tussen al die hartseer was daar mense wat vir my teksboodskappe gestuur en op Twitter geskryf het dat as hulle in my skoene was, hulle nou hul vanne na Van Graan sou verander. Dit was snaaks, maar ek kon nie toe daaroor lag nie.

Ek was ook diep ontroer deur minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula se verklaring oor my waarin sy my vir jare se diens bedank het. Sy het gesê sy het gedink ek het nie eens tyd gehad vir ’n kêrel nie en hoewel ek nie wou gehad het mense moes daaroor praat nie, was sy reg en dit was die eerste keer dat iemand so iets in die openbaar gesê het. Daar was ’n tyd toe ek nie vir twintig minute by ’n man kon wees sonder dat Madiba my bel om iets te doen nie. Ek het nooit daaroor kwaad geword nie. Hy was my nommer een. Wanneer ek soms in ’n kortstondige of ongesonde verhouding was, kon ek nooit alles van myself gee nie. My werk was alles en ek het nie omgegee nie. Dit was

my keuse. Die feit dat sy my bedank het, het my nog meer emosioneel gemaak. Ek het nooit verwag dat enigeen my sou bedank nie. Madiba het my bedank. Dit was genoeg vir my en die seën dat hy my gekies het, was ver bokant enige verwagtinge wat ek vir my lewe gehad het. Maar vir iemand van die ANC om my te bedank, het regtig my hart uitmekaar geskeur. Ek het nie net vir Madiba omgegee omdat ek vir hom omgegee het nie. Ek het geweet miljoene ander gee ook vir hom om en ek het probeer om sy belange so goed te dien as wat ek kon om te verseker dat daardie verhoudings met ander ook geëer sou word.

Mense het my op Twitter en Facebook bedank en ek is toegegooi met teks- en e-posboodskappe. Dit was alles oorweldigend en daar was te veel om te antwoord. Ek is 'n linkerbreindenker, iemand wat op detail fokus, en ek het eers gedink ek wil elkeen persoonlik bedank, maar soos die tyd verloop het, het my selfoon aanhoudend gevries as gevolg van al die boodskappe. Ek kon eenvoudig nie die tyd vind om te doen wat ek wou nie. Wat dit erger gemaak het, was die feit dat die mense wat hulle dank uitgestort het almal dieselfde verlies ervaar het. Hulle almal het hul eie emosies gehad waarna hulle moes omsien, en tog het hulle aan my gedink. Ek was diep ontroer.

Nou moes ons uitwerk hoe die mense op Madiba se vriendelyste geakkrediteer sou word. Sello het van sy kant af ook inligting probeer kry terwyl die personeel dag en nag gewerk het om vure dood te slaan as gevolg van die swak organisasie. Mense wou reëlings bevestig. Nie Sello of die personeel kon inligting kry nie. Intussen het mense gebel om besonderhede te vra oor die gedenkdiens wat op Dinsdag 10 Desember by die FNB-stadion in Soweto gehou sou word. Ek kon niemand antwoord nie omdat ek nie daardie inligting gehad het nie en niemand dit uitgereik het nie. Benewens Madiba se vriendelys, soos ons dit genoem het, het die Machel-familie skielik gehoor hulle sou net vyf akkreditasies ontvang en mevrou Machel sou die eerste daarvan wees. Dus sou net sy en vier ander Machels akkreditasie vir haar eie man se begrafnis ontvang. Dit was so belaglik dat 'n mens nie anders kon as om hardop van die lag uit te bars nie.

In die paar dae wat sou volg voor die gedenkdiens, het baie van ons feitlik glad nie geslaap nie terwyl ons probeer sin maak van die reëlings en om inligting in die hande te kry. Om te sê dit was chaoties, begin nie eers om die wanorde te beskryf nie. 'n Kombinasie van swak

beplanning en die geheimsinnigheid wat die staat afgedwing het, het gemaak dat dit ongelooflik swak bestuur is, as ’n mens in gedagte hou dat dit iets was wat almal geweet het moet gebeur. Ek het reg oor die wêreld saam met Madiba gereis en geleenthede bygewoon waar daar soms honderde staatshoofde was. Reëlings vir sulke groot gebeurtenisse is altyd ’n bietjie deurmekaar, maar tog het ek nooit chaos op hierdie skaal ervaar nie. Niemand kon vir jou al die nodige inligting gee nie en die planne het elke vyf minute verander. Selfs die mense in beheer kon nie vir jou ’n antwoord op enigiets gee nie, of so het dit gelyk.

Sondagaand, na ’n groot stryery en woordewisselings tussen my, die regering se protokolmense en die familie, het ’n senior leier in die ANC tot ons redding gekom. Sy het daarin geslaag om akkreditasies vir die Machel-familie gereël te kry en het dit by die Saxon-hotel afgelewer waar ek en Josina ontmoet het.

Alles was besig om in ’n klug te ontaard. As ons so gesukkel het om vir Nelson Mandela se weduwee en haar kinders akkreditasie te kry om sy gedenkdiens by te woon, het dit geheel en al onmoontlik geword om vir enigiemand anders amptelike akkreditasie te bekom.

Intussen het president Barack Obama en oudpresident Bill Clinton se voorspanne in die land aangekom en hulle wou besonderhede by almal, en so ook by my, kry. Humeure het opgevlam en almal kon die druk en die frustrasie aanvoel wat met die swak reëlings gepaardgegaan het. Ek het keer op keer gevra hoekom hulle agt jaar aan ’n ding beplan het en nou geen antwoorde kon verskaf nie. Ons het onprofessioneel gelyk en is onverhoeds betrap. Ons het die versekering gekry dat die mense op Madiba se vriendelys die volgende dag akkreditasie sou ontvang.

Maandagoggend vroeg het ons nog steeds oproepe hieroor gemaak. Teen tweeuur die middag het een van ons vriende, Basetsana Kumalo, na die ANC se hoofkantoor gegaan om die akkreditasiekaarte vir die mense op Madiba se vriendelys te gaan haal en ons het toe agtergekom net die helfte van die mense op die lys het akkreditasie ontvang. Die gedenkdiens was die volgende dag. En daar was geen manier dat mense van oorsee af sou invlieg tensy hulle vir seker geweet het hulle sou geakkrediteer word nie. Geen uitnodigings is gestuur nie en daar is van Madiba se vriende verwag om by die

stadion op te daag en dié wat eerste aankom sou plek kry en die ander sou tussen die skare in die pawiljoene gaan sit. Dit het mense soos emeritus-aartsbiskop Tutu ingesluit.

Terwyl al hierdie dinge gebeur het, en net toe dinge nie erger kon word nie, het ek onthou ek het 'n tandartsafspraak vir 'n wortelkanaalbehandeling. Ek het dit reeds die vorige week gemaak. My hartseer het my tandpyn oorskadu. 'n Vriendin, Marli, het my kom haal en tandarts toe gevat. Ek kon nie bestuur en terselfdertyd al die oproepe en navrae beantwoord nie. Terwyl die tandarts met my besig was, het Marli my foon geantwoord en vrae gevra terwyl ek met my mond oop in die tandarts se stoel gelê het. Ek moes amper vasgegespe word soos in 'n strokiesprent. Ek sou die feitlik onleesbare antwoorde vir Marli op 'n stukkie papier skryf in die uur en 'n half wat ek in die stoel deurgebring het en aanwysings gee. Die tandarts het gou besef dat hy nie die prosedure sou kon voltooi nie en het my gevra of ek die volgende week kon terugkom. Hy het agtergekom ek is onder druk en hy was ongelooflik geduldig. Hy het die pyn onder beheer gekry en ons het vertrek.

Met 'n mond vol watte en genoeg pynstillers om my brein en my mond te verlam (ek het hom gevra om vir my meer as die gewone hoeveelheid plaaslike verdowing in te spuit sodat my senuwees ook kon kalmeer, maar hy wou nie), het ek vir mense probeer sê dat ek nog steeds geen inligting het nie. Ek het optimisties probeer bly. Maar die oomblik as ek daarin geslaag het om almal te antwoord, sou die eerste persoon op die lys weer vir die jongste inligting vra. Ek was baie na aan 'n senuineenstorting en ek kon nie meer die druk hanteer nie.

By tye het Josina, Basetsana en ek op mekaar geskree en dan het ons histeries gehuil en dan sou ons die stukkies optel en weer probeer orde skep. Ons het geweet ons uitbarstings teenoor mekaar was veilig, wat die omstandighede ook al mag wees. George Cohen, die bestuurder van die Saxon-hotel wat 'n goeie vriend van ons geword het, en die eienaars, die Steyn-familie, het daarop aangedring dat ek in die tyd van die begrafnis in die hotel bly. George wou my ondersteun en het dit op elke moontlike manier probeer doen. Ek het 'n entjie buite die stad gebly en deur vir my blyplek in Johannesburg te gee, het hy baie van die druk op my verlig.

Aangesien sommige van Madiba se vriende ook in die Saxon-hotel gebly het, was dinge makliker omdat dit nie vir my nodig was om met almal op verskillende plekke te probeer kommunikeer nie. Wanneer ek ook al 'n brokkie nuwe inligting gekry het, maak nie saak hoe klein nie, sou ek dit met George deel en hy sou dit oordra aan die vriende wat ook in die hotel gebly het en met ander mense met wie hy kontak gehad het. Die personeel in die stigting se kantoor was besig met hul eie reëlings om ruimte vir die publiek te skep om te treur, en George en die hotelpersoneel het my gehelp oproepe ontvang en motorbestuurders gestuur om inligting te probeer kry, en tussendeur het George kos in my keel af probeer dwing. By meer as een geleentheid het hy op my afgekom toe ek in trane was. Dit was 'n mengsel van pyn en frustrasie, en hy het my gehelp om te kalmeer en oplossings te vind. Ek het gemeen al Madiba se vriende voel hulle is belangrik in sy lewe en hul versoeke om meer inligting of besonderhede te kry, was geldig. En my onvermoë om hulle te help het onprofessioneel voorgekom, asof ek nie omgee nie.

Die minister van verdediging het my Maandagaand gebel om te sê ek moet na die Uniegebou in Pretoria gaan om die akkreditasies vir die vriendelys uit te sorteer. Sy het gemeen dit was in dié laat stadium die enigste oplossing. Teen dié tyd het ek al almal wat ek gedink het ons sou kon help gebel of teksboodskappe vir hulle gestuur. Teen Maandagaand seweuur het ons nog nie eens geweet hoe laat die verrigtinge sou begin nie.

Dit was nie net ons nie. Die media kon ook geen planne maak nie. Die regering het die inligting stukkie vir stukkie, pynlik stadig, uitgereik.

Intussen was hulle by 1 Militêre Hospitaal in Pretoria besig om Madiba te balsem. Robyn Curnow, wat jare lank inligting van die familie ontvang het, het vir my gesê die oudstes van die Thembu-stam sou hom die hiernamaals inlei. Hulle sou met hom praat en aan hom verduidelik wat elke dag gebeur. Madiba kon nie burokrasie verduur nie en ek moes wonder wat sy reaksie sou wees as hy van ons frustrasies moes weet.

Marli het my per motor na die Uniegebou geneem in die geselskap van Sara Latham, 'n lid van oudpresident Clinton se voorspan en ook 'n ou vriendin. Die Clintons het haar persoonlik Suid-Afrika toe

gestuur om my te ondersteun op watter manier ek haar ook al nodig mag hê. Halfpad Uniegebou toe het Basetsana ons gebel om ons te sê hulle het nie akkreditasies by die Uniegebou gedruk nie en dat ons na Johannesburg moes terugkeer, en ons het. Ons is meegedeel dat die oorblywende akkreditasies teen tienuur die aand uitgereik sou word. Halfelf het ek weer gebel en hulle het vir my en Josina gesê die inligting sou eers Dinsdagoggend eenuur bekend wees. Teen eenuur het dit drieuur geword, en drieuur het gekom en gegaan sonder ’n enkele woord. Maar ons het aanhou wag. Teen vyfuur die oggend het ons mense begin bel, soos Johann Rupert wat van Kaapstad gevlieg het om die gedenkdiens by te woon, maar sy akkreditasie was ook nog nie afgelewer nie. Teen sesuur het ek twee akkreditasiekaarte by die hek van sy woning afgelewer, maar op die kaarte was daar name van mense van wie hy en sy vrou nog nie eens gehoor het nie. Daar was geen ander manier waarop ek hom kon help nie. Johann het op sy vliegtuig geklim en teruggevlieg Kaapstad toe.

Hy was een van die mense wat Madiba altyd sou bel wanneer hy finansiële hulp nodig gehad het vir sy projekte. Madiba se verhouding met die familie dateer van die samesprekings vroeg in die 1990’s na sy vrylating, en tog kon hierdie man nie die gedenkdiens bywoon nie, al het Madiba hom as een van sy seuns beskou.

Daarbenewens het nie een van Madiba se liefdadigheidsorganisasies en hul onderskeie uitvoerende hoofde of trustees akkreditasie gekry nie. Hul name het op al die lyste verskyn wat die vorige twee jaar verskeie kere by verskillende mense ingedien is. Personeellede wat jare lank in Madiba se diens was en wat ’n kritieke rol in sy lewe gespeel het, het nie akkreditasie gekry nie.

Teen agtuur die oggend, nadat ek net vyf-en-veertig minute lank geslaap het, het ek by ons kantoor aangekom van waar die Machel-gesin na die gedenkdiens sou vertrek. Ek het professor Njabulo Ndebele, die voorsitter van die stigting, en Sello nederig om verskoning gevra. Ek was diep teleurgesteld, seergemaak en verleë omdat daar nie vir hulle plek gemaak is nie. Indien mevrou Machel nie my naam as deel van haar familie ingedien het nie, sou ek ook nie geakkrediteer gewees het nie. Dit het gevoel asof dele van Madiba se verlede toegekalk of geïgnoreer word. Die mense wat hy persoonlik

aangestel het, die nalatenskap wat hy daargestel het, is van die kantlyn af verban met ’n kleinlike gebaar.

Advokaat George Bizos het ook by die kantoor aangekom en sy naam is ook as familie gegee. Ek het hom op die bus gehelp en Lori, my vriendin uit Los Angeles en Morgan Freeman se sakevennoot, gevra om te alle tye by hom te bly. By die stadion was dit chaos. Dit het aanhoudend gereën en ’n storm het oor Johannesburg gewoed. Party mense het gesê dit dui op geluk en dat die gode Madiba verwelkom het. Hy sou dit as snert afgemaak het. Die reën het ’n moeilike situasie net nog verder bemoeilik en chaos gesaai. Iemand het onlangs gesê Madiba het nie daarvan gehou dat mense om hom kloek nie en die reën was dalk sy manier om seker te maak daar word nie ’n bohaai oor hom gemaak nie.

Ons is herwaarts en derwaarts tussen die suites. Ons het op en af geloop met die bejaarde advokaat Bizos. In ’n stadium het ek probeer om emeritus-aartsbiskop Tutu, Kofi Annan en die oudstes te help toe die polisie by een van die deure van ’n suite hulle uiters ru behandel het. Dit het vir my so oneerbiedig gevoel.

Toe Bono, Sol Kerzner, Charlize Theron en Douw Steyn se vrou en kinders aankom, is hulle toegang tot een van die suites geweier. ’n Protokoloffisier het hulle letterlik weggejaag en hulle na enige oop suite langs ’n lang gang beduie. Ek het saam met hulle geloop en hulle eenvoudig na die naaste oop suite geneem waar daar niks te ete of te drinke was nie en net oranje plastiekstoele waarop hulle kon sit. Die enigste troos was dat hulle privaatheid daar gehad het. Wat dit erger gemaak het, was dat die suite agter ’n skerm aan die agterkant van die verhoog was van waar hulle feitlik niks kon sien nie. Ek het gesê ek sou terugkom om hulle te kom haal sodra ek die nodige reëlings getref het sodat hulle op ’n meer waardige plek kon sit, maar dat hulle daar moes bly omdat ek nie wou hê die polisie of die protokolmense moet hulle rondjaag nie. Die enigste woorde wat deur my gedagtes gespoel het, was: om Madiba te kon eer, moet jy sy verhoudings eer. As dit die laaste ding was wat ek vir hom kon doen, sou ek probeer om die verhoudings te eer wat hy gekoester het.

Na ’n gestryery, nog ’n gehuilery en ’n geskreeu nadat ek my humeur verloor het, het Jesse Duarte, die ondervoorsitter van die ANC, tot my redding gekom. Ek het vir haar gesê wat gebeur het en sy

het die protokolbeampte en die polisie by die deur van die ministeriële suite aangespreek en gesê Madiba se vriende moet toegang tot ’n ordentlike suite kry. Sy het my frustrasie gedeel en gedink dis onaanvaarbaar dat mense met soveel minagting behandel word. Sy het ’n protokolpersoon aan my afgestaan en een van ons vriende het hulle gaan haal.

Madiba het geleenthede verpes waar eindelose toesprake gelewer is. Hy het dit gehaat dat mense hom ure lank besing. Hy het gesê as iemand een keer iets goeds van jou gesê het, was dit genoeg. Hierdie was allermins die viering van sy lewe waarop hy gehoop het. Dit was nie ’n openbare vakansiedag nie en die stadion, wat negentigduisend mense kon huisves, was nie eens half vol nie. Dit was ’n verleentheid. Mense moes tyd by die werk afneem om die gedenkdiens by te woon en aangesien dit kort voor Kersfees was, was daar vir baie mense dalk nie verlof beskikbaar nie.

Josina en Malenga Machel, mevrou Machel se kinders, Madiba se stiefkinders, is ook opsy geskuif. Hulle was saam met ons en die res van die Machel-gesin in die ministeriële suite. Halfpad deur die program het iemand daar aangekom en aangekondig dat daar vir hulle voorsiening gemaak is op die veld saam met die res van die familie, maar ons het hulle gekeer om te verhinder dat hulle hulself verneder deurdat hulle eers in aanmerking gekom het nadat daar na al die ander mense omgesien is. Madiba het meer tyd saam met hierdie twee jong mense deurgebring as met enigeen van sy eie bloed. Hulle het hom laat glimlag en tog is hulle sonder enige waardigheid behandel.

Oudpresident Clinton het my na die presidensiële suite geroep omdat hy, Hillary en hul dogter, Chelsea, my wou groet. JD, die oudpresident se privaat sekretaris, het my kom haal en toe ek hulle sien het ek amper ineengestort. Dit was soos om my ouers en familie te sien. Ek het oor die voorafgaande negentien jaar baie tyd saam met hulle deurgebring en hulle het die feit waardeer dat ek so lief was vir Madiba, en ek het geweet hoe lief hy vir hulle was. Hulle het die pyn wat ons almal aangevoel het, gedeel. Hulle het regtig ’n diep liefde vir hom gehad, bo en behalwe professionele bewondering. Toe ek hulle sien, het ek geweet my verlies is hulle s’n ook. Dit maak nie saak hoeveel tyd jy saam met Madiba deurgebring het nie, jou verhouding is bepaal deur hoe jy in jou hart teenoor hom gevoel het en die

Clintons het dit verstaan.

President Obama het na ons mening ’n Martin Luther King-oomblik beleef en ’n toespraak gelewer wat in die toekoms as een van sy beste onthou sal word. Maar daar was te veel toesprake en dit was nie ’n viering van Madiba se lewe soos wat ons gehoop het dit sou wees nie. Dit het ure lank voortgesloer en daar is min gesing en gedans, iets wat Madiba sou verkies het. Dit het maar net weer gewys hoe swak party van sy eie mense Madiba verstaan het. Dat hulle dit so verkeerd kon benader!

Tot groot verleentheid het president Zuma se landgenote hom uitgejou elke keer wanneer sy naam genoem is of wanneer sy gesig op een van die groot skerms in die stadion verskyn het. Ek was glad nie verras nie. Dit was dieselfde oneerbiedigheid wat Jacob Zuma nagelaat het om te veroordeel tydens die verkragtingsaak teen hom, toe ongedissiplineerde jongmense van die ANC T-hemde met die destydse president, Thabo Mbeki, se afbeelding daarop aan die brand gesteek het. Dit het nou by ’n ander geleentheid en in ’n ander vorm na vore getree. Dit was soos ’n verhouding waarin mishandeling plaasvind. As jy dit een keer toelaat, kan jy nooit weer oor daardie lyn terugkeer nie. Dis destyds toegelaat, so hoekom sou dit nie nou toegelaat word nie? Ek was nie net vir president Zuma se onthalwe verleë nie, maar vir die hele Suid-Afrika.

Die Dinsdagaand na die gedenkdiens is ons na die huis in Houghton om mevrou Machel te sien en oudpresident Clinton en sy gesin het kort daarna uit Suid-Afrika vertrek. Sol Kerzner, een van die mense wat Madiba altyd laat glimlag het, is ook weg en dié topsakeman het ook hartseer in sy oë gehad. Selfs wanneer die Clintons of Sol nie gebel het nie, het ek die laaste jare vir Madiba gesê hulle het, en dit sou hom altyd laat glimlag en ek sou enigiets doen om sy gemoed te lig. Hulle het hom besoek wanneer hulle ook al kon en wanneer hulle om amptelike redes in Suid-Afrika was, en oudpresident Clinton sou altyd seker maak dat hy sy ander besoeke in Afrika kombineer met ’n besoek aan Suid-Afrika wanneer Madiba verjaar het.

Voor ek gaan slaap het, het ek probeer om te reël dat Bono, Naomi Campbell en die Steyn-familie die geleentheid kry om die volgende dag hul eer by die Uniegebou te betoon waar Madiba se liggaam besigtig kon word. Madiba het van Bono gehou, aangesien hy sy

profiel as ’n beroemde ster gebruik het wanneer hy ook al ’n goeie saak kon bevorder. Madiba sou ook altyd vir Bono vra om op te tree by die konserte en geleenthede ten bate van sy liefdadigheidsorganisasies. Bono het nooit geld verwag nie en het altyd sy eie reiskoste gedek. Naomi was die eerste beroemde wat die Nelson Mandela-kinderfonds in die openbaar ondersteun het. Sy is eerste as een van Madiba se ere-kleinkinders gedoop. Nadat Madiba sy huis in Soweto verlaat het tydens sy egskeiding van Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, het die Steyn-gesin Madiba ses maande lank huisvesting gebied waar hy *Long Walk to Freedom* en die tussentydse grondwet in hul huis geskryf het. Hulle het Madiba se kamerade en vriende onthaal en ruimte vir hom geskep om tyd saam met sy seun Makgatho se kinders deur te bring. Hierdie mense het almal hul regmatige plek in Madiba se lewe verdien en daar is nie ’n geleentheid aan hulle gebied om hul laaste eerbetoon aan hom te bring terwyl hy by die Uniegebou in staatsie gelê het nie.

Bridgette Radebe, die vrou van die minister van justisie, Jeff Radebe, het my laat weet dat sy en die minister ons die volgende oggend by die Saxon-hotel sou ontmoet om ons te help om by die Uniegebou uit te kom. Daar was ’n kordon om al die paaie en tensy jou motor akkreditasie gekry het, is daar van jou verwag om ure lank in toue te staan terwyl jy op openbare vervoer wag om jou na die Uniegebou te neem. Woensdagoggend sesuur het Bridgette gebel en gesê Jeff sou agtuur daar wees. Ek het tot seweuur gewag en toe vir George, die bestuurder van die hotel, gevra om Naomi, Bono en die Steyns wakker te maak. Bridgette het agtuur gebel om te sê Jeff is na ’n ander seremonie ontbied en dat hy ons nie sou kon help nie. Ek was weer paniekerig. Hoe sou ek daarin slaag om hierdie mense by die Uniegebou te kry? Die regering kon tog seker nie van hierdie BBP’s verwag om vir vier of vyf uur saam met die publiek tou te staan om hul laaste eerbetoon aan Madiba te bring nie?

Ek het magteloos gevoel. Ek kon altyd dinge regmaak en deure oopmaak, maar hulle het nou een vir een toegeslaan. Dit het nie gehelp as ek dink hoe kwaad dit Madiba sou gemaak het nie. Jy moet maar net sterk staan en dit hanteer en ’n ander uitweg vind.

Terwyl ek op die foon besig was in die Saxon-hotel, het

oudpresident F.W. de Klerk, wat ook in die hotel gewoon het, gehoor wat ek sê. Hy was in 1990 die president toe Madiba uit die tronk vrygelaat is. Madiba het van hom gehou en het met groot respek van hom gepraat, en ek het daardie respek met hom gedeel. Toe ek klaar was met die oproep, het oudpresident De Klerk vir my gesê: 'Zelda, praat met Norman, my veiligheidsman, en kyk of jy saam met hom iets kan uitwerk wat jou sal help.' En teen kwart oor nege het ons almal in die konvooi van oudpresident De Klerk en sy vrou, Elita, vertrek. Die ironie hiervan was vir my eenvoudig te veel. Hier was die man wat apartheid vir soveel mense verteenwoordig het op 'n manier weer besig om Madiba te red. Ek kon dit nie hanteer nie en dis iets waarvan ek Madiba so graag sou wou vertel. Maar dit sou hom nie verbaas het dat oudpresident De Klerk tot ons redding gekom het nie. Ondanks hul politieke verskille van tyd tot tyd het hy oudpresident De Klerk as 'n billike en goeie mens beskou.

Toe ons by die presidensiële gastehuis aankom, is die beroemdes toegelaat om in te gaan, maar ek en die Steyns is uitgehou. Toe minister Jeff Radebe en sy vrou, Bridgette, daar opdaag, moes hulle my binnetoe begelei en ek moes 'n plan uitwerk om die Steyns te laat inkom. Uiteindelik is al ons gaste na die Uniegebou vervoer waar Madiba in staatsie gelê het.

Terwyl ons by die Uniegebou se trappies afgeloop het, het 'n kalmte oor my neergedaal. Ek moes gereed wees om vir Madiba totsiens te sê. Ek moes die woorde in my gedagtes orden. Ek het nie beplan om enigiets hardop te sê waar iemand my kon hoor nie. Hy het altyd geweet wat ek dink nog voor ek dit gesê het. En soms wanneer ek iets vir hom gesê het, of iets aan hom genoem het, sou hy sê: 'Jy weet, Zeldina, dis vreemd dat jy dit nou noem, ek het nou net aan dieselfde ding gedink.' Dit sou hierdie keer nie anders wees nie, het ek besluit.

'n Paar treë voor die kis het ek besef dat dit vir my te moeilik sou wees. Ek het hom 'n hele paar maande lank nie gesien nie. Ek het klaar na hom begin verlang. Naomi het agter my geloop en toe het sy gevries. Sy was bang en die trane het weer uit my oë begin stroom. Ek was histeries en hoe graag ek haar ook al wou help, kon ek nie eens myself help nie. Ek het Bridgette Radebe se hand vasgeklou, maar sy het my toe laat gaan en Naomi se hand geneem. Ek wou ook gehad het sy moet Naomi help. Die volgende oomblik het Olivia Machel,

Samora Machel se dogter en mevrou Machel se stiefdogter, my linkerhand geneem en Bono, met sy vrou, Ali, aan die ander kant, het my regterhand geneem en dit was ons beurt om die kis te nader.

Ek was so bedaard as wat ek onder die omstandighede kon wees totdat ek Mandla Mandela, Madiba se kleinseun wat langs sy oupa se kis wag gestaan het, in die oë gekyk het. My hart het gebreek. ’n Fisieke pyn wat ek aan niemand kan beskryf nie, maar wat ek seker is baie mense al ervaar het, het my oorval. Ek wou bitter graag met Mandla praat en hom ’n drukkie gee, maar ek kon nie. Mandla was soos my kleinboetie.

Bono en Olivia het my na die kis gelei, en daar was Madiba. Leweloos, dood, koud. Khulu was weg. Die eerste ding wat ek opgemerk het, was ’n litteken aan die kant van sy nek waar die dokters duidelik ’n buis geïnstalleer het, waarskynlik een van baie buise wat hom die laaste ses maande aan die gang gehou het. Nou was daar niks oor nie, niks anders as ’n litteken nie. Daar was nie meer ’n gat nie, maar wanneer ’n mens so lank saam met iemand werk, ken julle uiteindelik mekaar se littekens. Ek het elke klein merkie op sy gesig geken en hierdie een in sy nek was nuut. Ek het ook opgemerk dat hy ’n donkergrys kleur was, en daarna het ek gesien sy bors was heeltemal plat. So plat soos ’n tafelblad. Dit het my ontstel om hom so te sien, maar ek het net enkele minute gehad om totsiens te sê. Bono het oorgeneem en ’n gebed gesê en hoewel dit baie mooi was, kon ek nie asemhaal of ophou hyg nie. Bono het die Here gedank omdat Hy ons met Madiba geseën het en Hom gevra om by Madiba te bly en ook met ons terwyl ons sin van die lewe probeer maak ná Madiba. Bono het ons weggelei en ek het gevoel asof ek wil omdraai en terughardloop. Ek wou nog steeds iets sê. Ons wil altyd nog iets sê, wil ons nie? Maar die lewe het my geleer dat ons meer gereeld die dinge wat ons nié gesê het nie berou as die dinge wat ons wel gesê het, en in die laaste jare het ek seker gemaak dat ek vir Madiba gesê het hoe lief ek hom het, hoe baie ek hom waardeer en hoe dankbaar ek was. Ek wou dit nooit berou dat ek dit nie vir hom gesê het nie en toe ek wegstap, het ek geweet dis een ding wat hy van my weet, daar waar hy lê.

Bono en Olivia het my hande vasgehou en ek kan nie onthou dat ek die trappe van die Uniegebou opgeklim het nie, waarskynlik vir die

laaste keer. Op die terugtog van die presidensiële gastehuis het niemand 'n woord gesê nie. Teen dié tyd het ek opgehou om te probeer om my trane in te hou en hulle het net teen my wange af gestroom. Dit het gevoel asof ek nie kan asemhaal nie en ek wou alleen wees, maar ek het ander mense gehad aan wie ek moes dink.

Terug by die Saxon het ons middagete gehad en ek was baie hartseer om Bono en Ali te laat gaan. Ek het oor die jare ook baie na aan hul personeel gekom en ons het goeie vriende geword. Hulle het almal geestelike steunpilare geword en Bono is 'n soort prediker. Hy het 'n baie diep begrip van die lewe en dwarsdeur Madiba se lang siekte het hy gereeld boodskappe van bemoediging gestuur. Hy het nooit enigiets soos inligting gevra nie, maar hy het 'n rits lieflike woorde gestuur. Ek onthou die sêding 'ons is almal net hier om saam huis toe te loop' en dit het my 'n bietjie kalmer laat voel. Die spanning en die emosies van die dag het my uitgeput. Op 'n manier het ek gevoel Madiba se vriende is elkeen 'n spesiale soort mens. Hy het sagte, vriendelike mense na hom toe aangetrek en ek het geweet hy sou bly wees dat hulle daar was om na my om te sien. 'Dis goed, Zeldina,' sou hy sê.

Die gebrekkige beplanning het voortgeduur en ek moes 'n besluit neem oor hoe ek die volgende paar dae sou oorleef. Daar was kortstondige oomblikke waartydens ek geestelik ineengestort het, maar daar was nie tyd om te sit en dink en Madiba se afsterwe by my te laat insink nie. Ek het nie tyd gehad om oor myself te dink of die gebeure te probeer verwerk nie. Omdat ek hom 'n paar maande lank nie gesien het nie, was dit feitlik ongelooflik om te dink dat hy regtig weg was. Ek het gewoond geraak aan die feit dat hy by sy huis was. Ook om soggens wakker te word en die eerste gedagte wat deur my kop flits, was dat hy ernstig siek was. Ek het nooit geweet hoe enige dag sou uitdraai nie, maar het ook nooit die einde verwag nie.

My uitdaging was nou om vir Alfre Woodard, Oprah Winfrey, Gayle King, Stedman Graham, Forest Whitaker en sir Richard Branson akkreditasie vir die begrafnis in Qunu te verkry, wat vir Sondag 15 Desember 2013 beplan is. Hulle het almal van die VSA gereis om daar te wees, maar ek was nie seker of ons vir hulle toegang sou kry nie. Hulle het nie die status van staatshoofde geniet nie en tog was hulle bo ministeriële vlak. Daar was nie 'n vlak wat vir hulle voorsiening

gemaak het nie. Hulle moes soos lede van die publiek behandel word, saam met die res van die massas. Ek sou dit nie duld nie. Die belaglike en onnodige moeilikhede het voortgeduur by ’n gebeurtenis wat agt jaar lank beplan is.

Toe ek by Madiba se huis aankom om iets vir mevrou Machel af te lewer, het ’n polisievrou in uniform vir my gesê ek mag nie die erf binnegaan nie omdat my akkreditasie vir die huis verval het. Ek het haar nog nooit voorheen gesien nie en sy het my pad versper. Maar langs haar het een van Madiba se lyfwagte gesit. Hy het nie probeer help nie en net stilgebly. Ek is na die wagkamer en het die kombuispersoneel probeer bel sodat hulle kon bevestig dat ek by die huis verwag word. Ek kon nie op die foon deurkom nie. Ek het die lyfwag gevra hoe lank hy vir Madiba gewerk het, en hy het gesê agt jaar. Ek het vir hom gesê Mum het my na die huis ontbied en gevra of hy dink sy gedrag om my nie te help ingaan nie is aanvaarbaar. Hy het gesê hy is nie aan diens nie en het net daar gesit om die polisievrou geselskap te hou. My laaste antwoord hierop was: ‘Hoe dink jy sou Madiba gereageer het as hy jou dit hoor sê? Nadat jy hom van diens was, behoort jy te weet. Ek het nie vir jou ’n antwoord nie. Jy moet regtig trots wees op jouself.’ Ek het Mum op haar selfoon gebel, natuurlik weer in trane, en sy het haar lyfwagte gestuur om my by die hek te kom haal.

In die huis het hulle vir my gesê ek moet foto-akkreditasie hê. Ek het na die kamer agter in die tuin gegaan waar akkreditasie deur die staat se protokolbeamptes hanteer is en ek het vir hulle gesê mevrou Machel het my daarheen gestuur vir akkreditasie, wat waar was. Hulle het geweier en gesê my naam is nie op die lys nie en dat net Makaziwe en Ndileka toestemming kon gee dat ek akkreditasie ontvang. Ek is daar weg en het na mevrou Machel gegaan en vir haar gesê ek gaan nou en ek sal nie bly vir die biddiens waarheen sy my genooi het nie. Ek was gewalg oor die feit dat die treurende weduwee moes ingryp om vir ons akkreditasie te reël. Sy het Makaziwe se man, Isaac, versoek om saam met my na die kamer te stap sodat ek weer kon probeer. Maar al het hy vir hulle gesê hy is Makaziwe se man en genoem dat dit ’n spesiale versoek van mevrou Machel was, het hulle geweier. Eers na ’n lang stryery het hulle ingestem. Ek het dit baie vreemd gevind dat Isaac gesê het dit was ’n spesiale versoek van

mevrou Machel.

Ek het mevrou Machel gaan groet en toe is ek weg. Sy wou gehad het ek moes vir die biddiens bly, maar ek was te ontsteld. Ek het haar verseker dat ek beskikbaar sou wees as sy my hulp sou nodig kry. Sy het steeds op my gesteun vir sommige van die administratiewe sake wat ek behartig het terwyl Madiba nog geleef het, soos om rekenings te betaal en oordrae te doen wanneer hulle my gevra het. Ek dink die ironie hiervan het my eie emosies meer intens gemaak. Die familie het my altyd gou gebel wanneer ’n oordrag na hulle gemaak moes word, maar ek het gevoel ek was nie goed genoeg om soos ’n mens behandel te word of selfs die hoflikheid van ’n basiese groet te verdien wanneer hulle by my verbygestap het nie, om nie eens te praat van om met ’n klein bietjie waardigheid geakkrediteer te word nie.

Ek moes nog steeds die Oprah/Branson/Whitaker-hekkie oorsteek en vir hulle akkreditasie verseker, en is toe daar weg.

Die volgende paar uur was dit toe presies wat ek gedoen het. Ek het vir almal e-posse gestuur, gebel, teksboodskappe gestuur en mense gevra om ’n uitsondering vir Madiba se vriende te maak. Dieselfde protokolmense het selfs vir die direkteur-generaal van die presidensie gesê hulle kan nie van hom instruksies neem nie. Dit het gelyk asof sekere dele van die regering koppe met ander dele gestamp het. Ek het gevoel dit het niks uit te waai met ’n eerbetoon aan Madiba of om hom die waardigheid te verleen wat hy verdien het nie, maar dat alles oor mag en oor ou wrokkighede gegaan het. Aan die ander kant het niemand egter geweet wie regtig in beheer was nie. ’n Mens kon nie anders as om te wonder of dit maar net agt jaar se swak beplanning, geldmors en oorsese reise was om ander lande te vra hoe ’n mens gebeure van hierdie omvang hanteer nie, en of dit ’n moedswillige poging was om persone uit te sluit wat nie in die ‘regte’ mense se guns was nie. Wanneer ’n mens agt jaar het om iets te beplan, kan jy dit tog sekerlik reg doen. Dit was onsmaaklik om daarna te luister en dit het my diep seergemaak dat mense wat baie lief was vir Madiba so behandel moes word. Hulle het daarop aangedring dat Oprah en die ander na die akkreditasiekamer by die Houghton-huis moes kom om geakkrediteer te word. Ek het dit so aan almal oorgedra.

Helaas moes ek toe hoor dat die akkreditasie eers toegestaan is nadat Oprah, Forest, Gayle en ander vir tallose foto’s saam met die

protokolmense moes poseer. Dit was walglik. Ek kan nie dink dat Madiba tot hierdie tipe behandeling vir sy vriende sou toestem nie. Ek sou nooit, ooit vir Madiba aan hierdie tipe behandeling blootgestel het nie, en tog is daar van sy vriende verwag om foto's saam met bewonderaars te laat neem om hul pad oop te maak vir akkreditasie. In die negentien jaar wat ek Madiba gedien het, het ek nie 'n enkele keer gevra dat enige van sy gaste saam met my op 'n foto moet verskyn nie. Ek het Madiba ook nooit gevra om 'n foto saam met my te laat neem nie. Tydens my werk saam met hom is daar heeltyd foto's geneem, of hy sou my soms nader roep om saam met gaste vir 'n foto te staan en net 'n paar keer het van sy vriende gevra dat ek by 'n foto ingesluit word. Maar dit is presies een van die redes waarom ek so lank by hom gebly het. Ek het nooit toegelaat dat die feit dat ons gewoond was aan mekaar of fotogeleenthede my aandag aftrek van die manier waarop hy wou hê ek my moet gedra nie. By 'n geleentheid het hy my gevra of dit dan 'n geval was van dat ek nie saam met hom afgeneem wíl word nie, en ek het gelag en hom verseker dat dit nie so was nie. Die manier waarop die protokolmense nou opgetree het, was vir my geheel en al onaanvaarbaar.

Ek het uiteindelik die Vrydag saam met Josina en lede van hul familie en vriende in die Oos-Kaap aangekom op 'n private vlug wat deur Faizal en Malaika Motlekar gereël is. Toe ons in Mthatha land, het ek agtergekom hoe welig en groen die heuwels was. Daar het swaar reëns geval en dit het voortgeduur, wat iets is wat Madiba baie gelukkig sou gemaak het, en ek het so gewens hy kon dit sien. Hy was gelukkig wanneer die grond van sy sielswêreld genoeg water gekry het en vrugbaar was vir weiding en boerdery. In 'n onderhoud met Robyn Curnow van CNN het een van Madiba se kleinseuns die storie vertel van 'n keer toe hy en Madiba in die sitkamer van sy Qunu-huis gesit het en Madiba vir Mbuso, sy jong kleinseun, gesê het hy moet kaal in die reën gaan hardloop. Madiba het gesê dis wat hy gedoen het toe hy jonk was. Hy het die lewe onvoorwaardelik liefgehad, wat ook al met hom gebeur het, keer op keer op keer. Dink maar net hieraan: 'n jong Nelson Mandela wat tagtig jaar gelede op hierdie selfde heuwels rondhardloop. Naak en onbeswaard deur die verlede en sonder voorkennis van sy toekoms. Miskien was die reën 'n gepaste manier vir hom om huis toe te kom.

Terwyl ons van die lughawe gery het, is ek herinner aan die manier waarop ek hom laat glimlag het wanneer ons ook al in Qunu was en ek hom op sy besnydenisnaam gegroet het: 'Ahhh, Dalibhunga!' Die Afrikaanse meisie het hom op sy Xhosanaam gegroet; dit het hom vermaak en gewoonlik die grootste glimlag op sy gesig geplaas.

Ons het by 'n paar beeste verbygery en ek het teruggedink aan sy liefde vir sy kudde. Ons het in die verlede op sy plaas rondgery en na die koeie en bulle gekyk en ek dink hy het heimlik gewens hy kon 'n groot beesboer wees. Hy het altyd vir my gesê in sy tradisie word 'n man se rykdom gemeet aan die aantal beeste wat hy besit. Hy het tussen dertig en sestig besit en ek sou hom antwoord: 'O, Khulu, dan is u baie ryk!' En hy sou lag.

Die feit dat hy so toeganklik was en sy natuurlike liefde vir mense is wat ek onthou. My vernaamste rol tydens my jare by hom was om sy beskermer te wees, die skild, die mens wat moes keer dat ander hom met liefde versmoor. Sy oopheid het vir my teenstrydig gelyk met die geslotenheid van die begrafnisreëlings. Dit het my verwar en hartseer gemaak en dit was 'n verleentheid.

Die wêreldmedia het op Qunu toegesak. Ek onthou hoe baie Madiba van joernaliste gehou het en toe ek hulle sien, het ek gedink hoe beïndruk hy sou gewees het om so baie van hulle in Qunu te sien en hoe hy oor sy klein dorpie sou spog. Hy het hulle gereeld gebel wanneer 'n joernalis 'n kritiese artikel oor hom geskryf het. Hy sou hulle dan oornooi vir ete en hulle sou aanvaar hulle is in die moeilikheid omdat hulle hom gekritiseer het. Maar kort na hul aankoms by sy huis sou hulle agterkom dat hy net met hulle wou praat om die rede vir hul kritiek te probeer verstaan. Die joernaliste sou nie altyd tot nuwe insigte gebring word nie, en Madiba het nooit probeer om hulle te oorreed nie. Na sy gesprek met hulle sou hy 'n ingeligte mening hê en hoewel hy hulle soms van mening sou laat verander deur die regte inligting oor te dra, sou hulle nooit vyandig daar weggaan nie. Toe ek soveel bekende gesigte in Qunu sien, het dit my laat dink aan baie soortgelyke geleenthede en hoe Madiba hulle met sy sjarme die hof sou maak. Hy was lief daarvoor om inligting met die media te deel en het verstaan dat hulle 'n werk het om te doen. Hier het dinge egter so anders gewerk – die media is weggehou

en inligting is verswyg om te wys waar die mag gesetel het.

Sondag het ons vieruur die oggend wakker geword om gereed te maak vir die begrafnis. Ek het ’n plan probeer maak om advokaat George Bizos by die huis te kry sodat dit nie nodig vir hom sou wees om op ’n bus te klim nie. Hy is oud, broos en loop moeilik. Ironies genoeg het een van Madiba se gewese lyfwagte, Piet Erwee, ons gehelp om hom in te kry, deur padversperrings en polisiewagposte, sonder dat hy self enige akkreditasie gehad het. Dit was sy laaste eerbetoon aan Madiba. Piet was ’n werknemer van Rory Steyn, ’n gewese polisiebevelvoerder en een van Madiba se vertrouelinge onder die lyfwagte uit die dae van sy presidentskap. Rory het nou ’n baie suksesvolle veiligheidsmaatskappy en sy verhaal is nog een van hoe suksesvol ’n mens kan wees as jy jou passie in die lewe dien.

Toe ons in Qunu aankom, was dit gepas dat advokaat Bizos na die huis toe sou gaan om die familie te groet. Ons het deur die kombuisdeur ingegaan omdat hulle die voordeur gesluit het en ons verbied het om in te gaan. Makaziwe se dogter het aan die binnekant gestaan en geskree dat die deur vir niemand oopgemaak mag word nie, ongeag wie hulle is. Ek het advokaat Bizos en sy seun deur die kombuisdeur aan die agterkant van die huis gelei en toe deur die eetkamer. Makaziwe het verby ons gestap en skaars gegroet. Soos Madiba meer broos geraak het, was dit duidelik dat hulle nie van sy keuses gehou het wat sy aanstellings of sy vriende aanbetref nie. Dit het ook vir advokaat Bizos gegeld. Makaziwe het sy aanstelling as trustee van een van Madiba se trusts vroeër die jaar teengestaan en dit is gevolg deur ’n openbare moddergooiery waarin Makaziwe se dogter advokaat Bizos beledig en verkleineer het. Nie een van ons is by die huis verwelkom nie.

Ons het haar beskaafd gegroet toe sy by die kombuis inloop. Sy het egter vasberade omgedraai en teruggestorm na die eetkamer. ‘Zelda, ons wil julle mense nie hier hê nie. Noudat oom George hier is, kan hy maar bly, maar ek wil nie julle mense hier hê nie.’

Ek het gesê: ‘Makaziwe, ek is bereid om dit so te aanvaar, as een van julle net vir my kan sê wat ons met iemand soos oom George kan doen.’

Sy het haar bevel herhaal: ‘Ek wil julle mense nie in die huis hê nie.’ Isaac het toegekyk en ek het omgedraai en weggeloop. Oom

George en sy seun het verby haar geloop na die sitkamer waar die ander mense vergader het.

Kort daarna het Tokyo Sexwale, wat saam met Madiba op Robbeneiland was en in sy regering gedien het, daar aangekom en hy is ook die deur gewys. Tokyo se aanstelling deur Madiba as trustee op dieselfde trust as advokaat Bizos is ook deur Makaziwe bevraagteken. Hierdie mense is vir ’n baie goeie rede deur Madiba aangestel om in die trust te dien. Toe hy siek geword het en nie meer namens homself kon praat nie, het die familie sy besluite uitgedaag en dit was duidelik dat hulle dit aan elke front sou doen wanneer hy nie meer daar was nie. Ek is nie die enigste een wat weggejaag is nie.

Ek het dit moeilik en emosioneel uitdagend gevind om Madiba se laaste jare te versoen met dit wat ons vir sestien jaar of so ervaar het. Om te sê daar is ’n algehele teenstrydigheid sou dit baie sagkens stel.

Qunu is ’n gemeenskap in ’n vallei tussen majestueuse berge. Madiba se plaas is klein, maar in vergelyking met dié van sy bure heel weelderig. Hoewel die huis wat hy en mevrou Machel in die vroeë 2000’s gebou het nie vergelyk kan word met die lewenstandaarde in die omliggende gebied nie, is dit beskeie in vergelyking met die huise van mense in dieselfde soort posisie. Die enorme tentkoepel wat vir die begrafnis opgerig is, was eers vir my ’n skok. Dit was nie net ’n groot tent nie, maar so groot soos ’n klein vliegtuigloods. Ek het gehoor dat die koepel jare lank weggebêre is in afwagting van Madiba se afsterwe. Dis in Duitsland gekoop, het ek verneem, en ek het gedink dis net vir Madiba se begrafnis dat ’n mens kan wegkom daarmee om so iets in Europa te koop. Die vakbonde sou sê dit was ’n gulde geleentheid om werk in Suid-Afrika te skep. Baie jare gelede het ons ’n groot aantal T-hemde in die Ooste gekoop vir een van Madiba se veldtogte en die media en publiek het hard na ons gekap omdat ons nie die Suid-Afrikaanse tekstielbedryf ondersteun het nie. Ek skat ’n begrafnis is anders. Die pad tussen die huis en die koepel is ’n eenvoudige gruispad, en as ’n mens die voor- of agterpaadjie na die koepel neem, kry jy ’n goeie idee van die grootte van die werf. En jy kon die beeste sien waarop Madiba so trots was.

Ek het begin aanstaltes maak na die koepel en Madiba was die heeltyd in my gedagtes en in my hart. Die koepel was omtrent een en ’n halwe kilometer weg van die huis. Hy sou die feit dat ek die huis

belet is afgekeur het. Hy sou ook die kwistigheid van die enorme koepel op sy plaas afgekeur het. ’n Paar jaar tevore, toe hy nog besluite kon neem en kon sê wat hy dink, het hy daarop aangedring dat ek in die huis moet wees vir die finale seremonie na Makgatho se dood. Nou was ek uitgesluit omdat hy nie meer op my teenwoordigheid kon aandring nie. By geleentheid het Madiba self mense uit die huis gejaag, nog so onlangs soos Desember 2009, hoewel ek een van dié was wat hom probeer oortuig het om meer toegeeflik te wees. Sy stem is stilgemaak.

In dié moeilike tye moet ek immers een van Madiba se grootste lesse onthou: my verhouding was met hom en niemand kan dit van my wegneem nie. Mense sterf, maar verhoudings gaan nie dood nie en my verhouding met Madiba sal nooit doodgaan nie.

Toe ek by die koepel aankom waar die meeste mense saamgekom het nadat hulle met busse van Mthatha af aangery is, omtrent ’n uur weg op die pad, het ek gehoor dat Oprah se bus nie op die perseel toegelaat is nie. Dit was ’n groot gesukkel om landingsregte vir haar vliegtuig in Mthatha te verkry, aangesien net die vliegtuie van staatshoofde toegelaat is om daar te land. Dit was verstaanbaar, tot ek verneem het daar is al reeds uitsonderings vir ander vliegtuie gemaak. Die bus wat sy van die Mthatha-lughawe geneem het, was nie geakkrediteer om die plaas binne te gaan nie en sy is by die hoofhuis afgelaai. Sy moes met die stofpad verby die beeste tot by die koepel stap. Rory het ’n minister se motor in die hande gekry waarin hy haar en haar afvaardiging die res van die pad tot by die koepel geneem het. Sy het Qunu twee keer tevore besoek en die laaste keer het sy by ons aangesluit om ’n Kerspartytjie vir meer as vyf-en-twintigduisend kinders van die nedersetting en omliggende gebied te hou. Madiba het haar ook een keer gevra om ’n skool te bou as deel van sy skoolbouprojek en sy het die eiesoortige Oprah Winfrey Academy naby Johannesburg tot stand gebring. Madiba het groot waardering vir haar en vir haar steun aan minderbevoorregte kinders in Suid-Afrika gehad. Haar rykdom was vir hom interessant en hy het gereeld vir mense vertel van haar vrygewigheid om die mense wat opnames van haar televisieprogram bywoon met motors te beloon. Hy sou die sin só afsluit: ‘Kan jy jou dit voorstel?’

Terwyl Oprah, Stedman, Forest en Gayle na die koepel op pad was,

het ek probeer om sitplekke vir advokaat Bizos, sir Richard Branson en ander te vind. Sodra iemand wat ek geken het by die deur aankom, het ek hulle in die rigting gewys waar Bridgette Radebe en haar broer, Patrice, sitplekke vir Madiba se vriende oopgehou het.

Mum was nog in die hoofhuis, besig om gereed te maak om saam met Madiba na die koepel en na die plek waar hy ter ruste gelê sou word, te vertrek. Ek kon die vorige dag op beeldmateriaal sien dat sy geheel en al uitgeput was. Hulle het Madiba voorberei vir sy laaste reis, op teen die heuwels van sy geliefde plaas in Qunu.

Nadat ek vir al die gaste sitplekke gevind het, kon ek nie vir myself een kry nie, tensy ek bereid was om tussen die militêre mense te sit wat deel was van die prosessie. Ek was verleë omdat ek so emosioneel was, daarom het ek 'n plekkie buite op die gras gevind naby Robyn Curnow, wat vir CNN verslag gedoen het oor die verrigtinge. Van daar af kon ek die verrigtinge op 'n luidspreker van die SABC volg en beeldmateriaal op 'n skerm wat aan 'n satellietskottel gekoppel was. Die lykswa het opgedaag met Madiba se kis agterop 'n kanonwa. Dit was in die Suid-Afrikaanse vlag gedrapeer. Daar was nóg ironie. Ek was buite en hoewel ek uitgesluit gevoel het, was daar baie min ander mense buite en het dit vreemd genoeg vir my feitlik 'n persoonlike geleentheid gebied om totsiens te sê. Toe die militêre optog verbybeweeg, kon ek skaars asemhaal, so het ek gehuil. Ek het Mandla eers voor die militêre voertuig gesien waar hy steeds wag hou oor sy oupa en nadat Madiba verbygekom het, het Mum se motor gevolg en ek kon haar deur die motorvenster sien. Ek wou haar so graag vashou om haar te troos, maar wou ook hê dat sy my kon vashou. Madiba is met volle militêre eerbewys begrawe, wat beteken dat alle militêre seremonies en protokol op sy begrafnis van toepassing was.

Emeritus-aartsbiskop Desmond Tutu se teenwoordigheid was agt-en-veertig uur voor die begrafnis die fokus van 'n herrie in die media. Hy is uitgesluit deurdat niemand hom van enige behoorlike reëlings laat weet het nie. Ek kon sy pyn en hartseer sien toe hy saam met Trevor Manuel by die koepel opdaag. Ek het hom so lank as wat ek kon vasgehou. Ek wou hom troos en ek wou troos van hom hê. Madiba was so lief vir hom.

'n Vreemdeling, 'n swart man, het my gesien bewe van pyn en na my toe geloop, sy arms om my gesit en gesê: 'Zelda, toemaar, sisi, dit

sal beter word.' Ek wou in sy arms ineenstort, maar ek het geweet ek moet myself regruk en ek het hom met 'n drukkie bedank. Weke later het ek die man se gesig probeer onthou en gewonder of ek hom weer sou vind. Ek wil vir hom dankie sê dat hy dit gedoen het. Dit was nie net 'n drukkie en 'n poging om my te troos nie. Hy het regtig omgegee. Dit het my diepste wese geraak wanneer vreemdelinge, swart mense, op dié manier na my uitgereik het. Dis hoe ver ons in Suid-Afrika gekom het.

Die diens het begin en die verhoog was pragtig versier met vyf-en-negentig kerse vir elk van Madiba se jare op aarde. Ek moes 'n geleentheid gehad het om my eer te betoon en te bid, maar ek was meer oor die logistiek besorg en veral oor hoe ons Oprah en haar afvaardiging terug by die huis sou kry. Rykes en beroemdes van wie ek geen taal of tyding in negentien jaar gekry het nie, het akkreditasie vir toegang tot die begraafplaas gekry. Slegs vierhonderd van die vierduisend gaste het akkreditasie ontvang om by die graf te wees. Ek is gewys hoe die toegangskaarte lyk, maar ek het nie een ontvang nie.

Ahmed Kathrada, Madiba se jare lange vriend uit sy tronkdae, het tydens die seremonie die mees ontroerende toespraak gelewer. Hy het eer aan Madiba betoon en gesê Madiba het hom by die ANC se A-span in die hemel aangesluit. Hy was baie emosioneel en dit was hartseer om hom so te sien. Kathy, soos ons met deernis na hom verwys het, was met Madiba bevriend sedert die dae voor sy gevangenskap. Hulle het agttien jaar saam op Robbeneiland deurgebring en nog tyd in Pollsmoor nadat hulle van die eiland af geskuif is.

Die seremonie was spoedig verby, die een toespraak na die ander. Party van die toesprake was aandoenlik, maar ander was net pogings om vir oulaas in Madiba se helder lig te staan. Al wat my werklik aan Madiba herinner het, was die liedjie 'Rolihlahla Mandela' wat die kin ders gesing het. Die liedjie is vir Madiba geskryf en mevrou Machel het 'n week voor die begrafnis vir die prominente Suid-Afrikaanse kunstenaar Mbongeni Ngema gevra om dit saam met die kinders op te neem. Madiba se aansteeklike glimlag was duidelik in my geheue toe ek die liedjie hoor. Ek kon my sy opgewektheid verbeel as hy die klanke van daardie stemme sou kon hoor. Maar dit was nou alles verby. Die liedjie en die vyf-en-negentig kerse in die koepel was mevrou Machel se enigste versoek in verband met die begrafnis

waaraan gehoor gegee is.

Terwyl ek gewag het vir die verrigtinge om tot ’n einde te kom, het ek Madiba se begrafnisbrief gelees en dadelik agtergekom nie een van die Mandela-nalatenskapinstellings is genoem nie. Asof hulle nooit bestaan het nie.

Mense het in die rigting van die graf begin beweeg. Hulle het verby my gestap, baie van Madiba se vriende en natuurlik die hele familie. Party van Madiba se vriende het gevra hoekom ek nie saamgaan nie en ek het vir hulle gesê dat ek nie toegang gehad het nie. Party van hulle wou hê ek moes baklei vir toegang, maar ek het geweet ek het klaar totsiens gesê. My verhouding met Madiba is nie gedefinieer deur die feit dat ek langs sy graf gestaan het of nie. Dit was baie baie meer as dit. Robyn, Rory en ek, drie wit Suid-Afrikaners wie se lewe deur Madiba se leierskap en persoonlike liefde verander is, het saamgestaan en die verrigtinge op die skerm dopgehou. My verhouding met Madiba het nie beteken dat ek aan sy sy gestaan het tydens groot oomblikke in sy lewe nie, maar is gedefinieer deur die gewone oomblikke wat ek saam met hom deurgebring het. Rory, Robyn en ek het mekaar by tye vasgehou en geweet dat dit ’n oomblik in die geskiedenis is waar ons ons in die voorste linies bevind om op ons eie manier persoonlik van die groot man afskeid te neem. Ons Khulu, ons Tata en ons Madiba.

Ons het gestaan en die verrigtinge op die skerm gevolg en toe die saluut van een-en-twintig kanonskote afgevuur is, het dit geklink soos ’n salvo van verdriet in die lugruim. En toe het die helikopters met die Suid-Afrikaanse vlae saam oorgevlieg, laag oor die heuwels van Qunu, gevolg deur die vegvliegtuie. Die klank van daardie masjinerie het deur my liggaam geskud. Uiteindelik het dit ingesink! Dit was verby. Ek het hardop in trane uitgebars en op Robyn se skouer gesnik. Rory het ons al twee vasgehou en getroos terwyl ons bewe van die pyn. My gesig was papnat. Robyn was nie op lug nie en sy was op daardie oomblik net my vriendin, maar waarvan ons nie bewus was nie, was dat haar mikrofoon nog steeds regstreeks gekoppel was. My snikke is wêreldwyd op CNN gehoor terwyl beeldmateriaal van Madiba se laaste reis uitgesaai is. Robyn sê die ateljee in Atlanta het in haar oor geskreeu ‘die mikrofoon is warm!’ Sy het toe besef my tranerige ineenstorting is aan miljoene mense uitgesaai. Sy wou my nie los nie en het my nog stywer teen haar vasgedruk en my getroos. Minute later

was sy terug by die kamera en het sy die toneel om ons beskryf, en ook die kragtige gevoel van vertrek en hartseer. Haar oë was opsigtelik rooi van die trane wat sy saam met ons gestort het. Sy het beskryf hoe ek, Madiba se jare lange assistent, in trane uitgebars het en aan almal verduidelik wie die persoon is wat so gehuil het. Ek het eers twee weke later gehoor wat gebeur het en wat sy daaroor gesê het. Dit het nie vir my gevoel asof ek verraai is nie. Ek het my twee vriende, Rory en Robyn, nodig gehad om te keer dat my hart in stukke breek. Ek het gevoel asof ek my pyn met die wêreld wou deel, en ek hét sonder dat ek dit besef het, maar terselfdertyd het ek nog nooit so eensaam gevoel nie. Die gevoel van verlies en leegheid het my liggaam krampagtig laat saamtrek.

Hulle was steeds by die graf besig toe ek my pad na Madiba se huis begin terugvind. Ek moes eers na die hotel gaan, en ek was vasbeslote om daarna so spoedig moontlik terug te keer Johannesburg toe, huis toe. Ek kon niks meer verduur nie en ek wou by die huis wees, alleen saam met my honde. Ek het halfpad tot by Madiba se huis geloop en toe het Sam, een van Madiba se lyfwagte, my met ’n gholfkarretjie verder geneem. Ek kan my nie indink hoe ek gelyk het nie, maar terwyl ons by bekende gesigte verbygery het, mense wat Madiba op verskillende maniere gedien het, het hulle my gestop en ’n paar woorde met my gepraat. Ek het soos ’n sak uitgewaste klere gevoel. Ek het geen energie in my lyf oorgehad nie en ek kon nie meer my emosies beheer nie. Voormalige ANC-kollegas van Madiba wat ook kantlyn toe geskuif is of van die graf weggehou is, het gestop en met my gepraat. Ek het dit oorweeg om vir oulaas in die huis in te gaan, om na die leë geel stoel in Madiba se sitkamer te gaan kyk, maar ek moes so gou moontlik vervoer reël en het besluit vandag was nie ’n dag waarop ek my aan meer smart kon blootstel nie. Ek het geweet ek sou spoedig terug wees.

Voor my vertrek het ek vir Oprah en haar afvaardiging vervoer gereël van die koepel tot by die huis, waar hul bus vir hulle sou wag. Daar is ook reëlings vir sir Richard Branson getref en daar het vervoer op advokaat Bizos gewag. Daar was niks oor vir my om reg te maak nie. Ek het seker gemaak almal en alles is in die haak, en toe was dit tyd om myself los te maak. Ek het na die hotel vertrek en met my begrafnisklere in die bed geklim. Ek was op elke denkbare manier

uitgeput. Ek het twee uur geslaap en toe ek wakker word, het ek verneem my geliefde kollega, Yase, het daarin geslaag om die vlug te verander sodat ek dieselfde aand nog Johannesburg toe kon vlieg. Hy het besef dat ek alleen wou wees en het alles in sy vermoë gedoen om die vlug te verander. Toe lê ek die tweehonderd-en-sestig kilometer in die reën Oos-Londen toe af, waar ek 'n vliegtuig Johannesburg toe gehaal het. Ek was eenuur die oggend by die huis en dit het my 'n tydjie gevat om aan die slaap te raak.

Ek het die volgende paar dae daaraan bestee om rekenings te betaal. Die begrafnis was net tien dae voor Kersfees en die verskaffers moes hul personeel voor die vakansie betaal.

Ek het die res van my wortelkanaalbehandeling laat doen. Ek het Douw Steyn se een-en-sestigste verjaardagdinee bygewoon, wat 'n effense somber byeenkoms was aangesien hy ook siek gevoel het. In Junie het ek gedink ek het 'n besering in die gimnasium opgedoen, min of meer dieselfde tyd wat Madiba in die hospitaal opgeneem is. Ek het aanhoudende pyn in my heup gehad en soms het dit tot by my knieë gegaan. Maak nie saak hoeveel ek gestrek en hoeveel pyn of anti-inflammatoriese pille ek gedrink het nie, ek kon nie daarvan ontslae raak nie. Op 19 Desember het ek die oggend wakker geword en gedink ek is verlam. Ek het min gevoel in my bene gehad. Ek het 'n fisioterapeut-vriendin wat met vakansie was gebel om my te help, want ek was desperaat. Na baie behandeling het sy daarin geslaag om van al die spasmas ontslae te raak wat ek sedert Junie gehad het. Soos wat dit die vorige jare ook gebeur het, wanneer daar ook al iets met Madiba fout was, het die stres en kommer ook mý liggaam aangetas.

Uiteindelik, op Vrydag 20 Desember, het ek weer Mthatha toe vertrek. Ek wou vir oulaas gaan groet en eer by Madiba se graf betoon. In die dae voor my reis het ek baie oor die betekenis van die lewe en sterflikheid gedink en hoewel ons dit nie veel bespreek het nie omdat hy dit as 'n baie persoonlike saak beskou het, het ek gedink wat Madiba regtig oor die lewe en die dood geglo het. Na die voorafgaande twee weke het ons mevrou Machel soveel as moontlik beskerm, maar sy het geweet ek was nie daar toe hy begrawe is nie. Ek is nie die enigste een wat nie daar toegelaat is nie. Meme, die huishoudster, en Betty, een van die assistente by die huis, is ook uit die ry gehaal en verhinder om na die graf toe te gaan of selfs om by

die ingangsportaal van Madiba se huis te wees toe die kis van Johannesburg daar aangekom het. Tog was hulle ook lojale werknemers met baie jare diens.

’n Stadige lewenspas het weer oor die heuwels van Qunu geheers. Die koepel is verwyder en sproeiers het die nuwe gras wat geplant is natgelei waar die koepel gestaan het. Die beeste en bokke het soos vroeër los rondgeloop, onaangeraak deur die verandering van die lewe. Ek het reguit na die plaas toe gegaan om mevrou Machel te gaan groet. Dit sou die eerste keer wees dat ek haar sien sedert die Donderdag voor die begrafnis.

Ek wou by haar nader besonderhede oor die begrafnis hoor. Het Madiba een van sy gunstelinghemde aangehad? Sy het gesê hy het nie, nee, dit was nie een van sy gunstelinge nie. ’n Paar van sy persoonlike besittings wat vir hom belangrik was, is saam met hom graf toe. Ek het gevra oor sy ivoorkierie wat hy by Douw Steyn gekry het wat gemaak is uit die tande van ’n olifantbul wat op Shambala dood is. Ek was hartseer, maar nie verbaas om te verneem dat hulle nie die kierie kon kry nie. Ek het lank met Mum oor die kierie gepraat en sy pad nagespoor, eers na die huis in Qunu en toe Houghton, waar ons dit die laaste keer gesien het. Nie een van ons het die energie of die emosionele krag gehad om die kierie te begin soek nie en ek het my berus by die feit dat die kierie eendag gevind sal word en miskien sal een van ons nog lewe, of iemand sal hieroor lees en dit ontdek. Dit was duidelik gemerk ‘Aan Madiba, van Douw Steyn’ en daar was net een van sy soort, ’n soliede wit ivoorkierie. Dit moes saam met Madiba begrawe gewees het.

Toe ek tienuur daardie nag van Qunu na Mthatha toe ry, het die mooiste maan oor die heuwels opgekom, die helderste oranje maan wat ek nog ooit gesien het. Die gedagte het by my opgekom dat ’n wit Afrikanermeisie besig was om op haar eie van Qunu na Mthatha te bestuur. Madiba sou daarop aangedring het dat veiligheidspersoneel my vergesel omdat hy altyd besorg was oor my. Toe ek daaraan dink, het dit my laat glimlag. Maar ek het my oë op die maan gehou en besef dat Madiba alle vrees by my verwyder het. Ek het uiteindelik grootgeword. Twintig jaar gelede sou ek nie daarvan droom om alleen in die nag op hierdie pad te bestuur nie. Maar die Transkei, soos dit vroeër bekend gestaan het, kruip onder ’n mens se vel in. Die plek

word deel van jou. Twintig jaar gelede was ek vir soveel goed bang. Ek was bang vir die lewe en vir swart mense, vir hierdie swart man en vir die toekoms van Suid-Afrika. En nou het hoofstroomdenke nie meer my vrese en gedagtes beïnvloed nie. Ek was nou my eie mens. Madiba het ook vir my vryheid en vrede gegee. Ek het lig gevoel, vry en dankbaar dat Nelson Mandela my leermeester was. Soveel as wat ek oor hom getreur het, soveel het ek by hom gekry en in my motor op pad Mthatha toe het ek met hom gepraat met my oë op die helder maan.

Ons het die Sondagoggend na die graf gegaan. Ons sou almal Sondagmiddag vertrek. Net na agtuur die oggend het ek, Mum, Josina, Meme, Betty en 'n paar ander werkers en die veiligheidspersoneel na die graf gery. Ons het die vorige dag vars blomme bestel en ons het begin om Madiba se graf en dié van sy drie kinders skoon te maak. Ons was stil en die stemming was gewyd. Al die grafstene het die familiewapen op wat aan my bekend was omdat dit op die House of Mandela-wynbottels gebruik is. Ons het die ou blomme verwyder, bosse wit blomme wat op sy graf neergelê is en wat nou om die grafsteen gelê het, orgideë en rose. Teen dié tyd is hulle deur die wind verwaai en deur die son beskadig. Ons het vars blomme opgesit, waarna Mum ons almal saamgeroep en Meme gevra het om te bid. Meme het pragtig gebid en ek het gesidder toe ons tydens die gebed hande vashou. Meme het in Sotho gebid en my gedagtes het weggedryf na Afrikaanse gebede, en toe na 'n boodskap wat ek vir Madiba wou stuur. Ek het hom weer bedank en gesê, soos soveel keer tevore, hoe baie ek hom waardeer en, die belangrikste, dat hy moet onthou dat ek hom liefhet.

Kort na twaalfuur die middag het die vliegtuig van die Mthatha-lughawe opgestyg. Dit was die langste vlug van vyf-en-vyftig minute van Mthatha na Johannesburg van ons hele lewe. Dit was alles verby, finaal. En die volgende hoofstuk sou moeilik wees. Ek het geweet daar was 'n oorlog aan die broei oor die testament en die beheer oor Madiba se nalatenskap. Dit was, soos hulle sê, 'n teken van die tye. Die laaste paar maande het my herinner aan die storie van Tolstoi. Ironies genoeg was daar baie ooreenkomste met die lewe van daardie groot Russiese skrywer vir wie se werk Madiba so lief was. Hoe skares voor sy dood saamgedrom het en die stryd oor die beheer van sy

nalatenskap en sy testament.

Ek het in die klein vliegtuigie die naaste aan die deur gesit en my sitplek het na agter gewys. Die private vlug was baie geriefliker as 'n kommersiële vlug, maar ons het blootgestel gevoel omdat daar geen plek was waar ons ons emosies kon wegsteek nie. Ek kon Mum se pyn voel toe ek sien hoe sy in trane uitbars terwyl ons vliegtuig stadig deur die dik wolke beur. Uiteindelik het ons almal trane gestort, daar in ons sitplekke. Ek, Mum, Josina, Betty, Celina – mevrou Machel se skoonsuster – en Cordier, die lyfwag. Niemand het 'n woord gerep nie.

Mum was gewoonlik so sterk en beheersd, maar daar waar ons deur die wolke geklief het, weg van Madiba af, en hom alleen agtergelaat het, het ons gevoel asof ons hom versaak en verlaat – die enigste ding wat ons hom nooit wou laat voel nie en die een ding wat ek hom belowe het ek nooit sal doen nie. Maar wat doen ons nou? Hy is tuis en helde is onsterflik. Hy sal altyd in daardie pragtige heuwels teenwoordig wees en ek weet nou hy sal selfs kragtiger in die dood wees as wat hy in die lewe was.

Sy beeld, sy nalatenskap moet beskerm word.

Ek weet nie wat ek die res van my lewe gaan doen nie. Sy lang siekte het my gedwing om groot te word. Dit het my van die waardevolste lesse in my lewe geleer en my gewys wat 'n mens nié van mense moet verwag nie. Madiba het nie net weer die land verenig nie, hierdie keer deur sy siekte en dood, maar hy het ons meer geleer as wat ons te wagte was. Ek sal die lewe toelaat om sy loop te neem met my en ek weet nou ek sal altyd op die plek wees waar ek veronderstel is om te wees, op enige gegewe oomblik. Ek het geen planne anders as dat ek hom elke jaar deur die Bikers For Mandela Day wil eer nie. Miskien sal ek ander werk vind. Miskien sal ek 'n man vind saam met wie ek die res van my dae wil deurbring. Iemand wat sal weet en die feit respekteer dat ek 'n deel van my hart weggegee het … aan 'n ou swart man wat eens 'n vyand van my mense was en nou soos 'n antieke koning diep in die grond van Suid-Afrika in die goue heuwels van Qunu lê.

Ons sal hom in elke sonop en sonsondergang sien. Ons moet net aanhou om na hom te soek. Hy sal na ons omsien as ons sy lesse onthou.

Ons het stadig bo die wolke uitgeklim waar die sonskyn en die

warm lig van die Afrika-son wat by die vliegtuig se vensters inskyn uiteindelik ons gesigte warm gebak het en die trane laat opdroog het. Wat ook al verder gebeur, ek weet ons het ons bes gedoen.

'Tot weersiens, Khulu!'

Word vervolg …



My brother Anton and me.

1. Ek en my broer, Anton.



Proof that riding a motorbike is in my blood: my grandmother Betty la Grange (on the right) on her motorbike in the 1940s.

2. Motorfietsry is in my bloed, en hier is die bewys: my ouma Betty la Grange (regs) op haar motorfiets in die veertigerjare.



My early childhood (early 1970s), dreaming of becoming an actress.

3. Ek het kleintyd, in die vroeë jare sewentig, daarvan gedroom om aktrise te word.



Greeting Madiba at the military airport upon his arrival back from holiday in Saudi Arabia, 1994. To his left, behind him, is Mary Mxadana, his Private Secretary at the time.

4. Ek groet Madiba met sy aankoms by die militêre lugmagbasis ná ’n vakansie in Saoedi-Arabië in 1994. Links agter hom is Mary Mxadana, sy destydse private sekretaresse.



Desperate measures: I mastered the art of sleeping anywhere, here covered with Madiba’s raincoat, on board an Oryx military helicopter flying off to a school-building project in rural South Africa. To the left is Linga Moonsamy, one of the bodyguards.

5. Noodmaatreëls: Ek het die kuns bemeester om enige plek te slaap. Hier is ek onder Madiba se reënjas in ’n Oryx-militêre helikopter op pad na ’n skoolbouprojek in ’n landelike gebied. Links is Linga Moonsamy, een van die lyfwagte



I learn to dress up. (1): in my designer abaya on the stairs of the government guest house in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, late 1990's.

7. Ek leer om op te tof. (1): In my ontwerper-abaya op die trappe van die regeringsgastehuis in Riaad, Saoedi-Arabië, in die laat jare negentig.



I learn to dress up. (2): Early 2000s in Iran with one of Madiba's bodyguards, Anton Calitz.

8. Ek leer om op te tof. (2): Vroeg in die dekade 2000 in Iran saam met een van Madiba se lyfwagte, Anton Calitz.



I learn to dress up. (3):Madiba's last state visit abroad as President, standing in the Bolshoi theatre in Moscow with my colleague Priscilla Naidoo, 1999.

9. Madiba se laaste oorsese staatsbesoek as president, in die Bolsjoi-teater in Moskou saam met my kollega Priscilla Naidoo, 1999.



Assisting Madiba out of a meeting with his good friend President Bill Clinton, at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, New York, mid 2000s.

10. Ek help Madiba ná ’n vergadering met sy goeie vriend, president Bill Clinton, by die Waldorf Astoria-hotel, New York, in die middel van die dekade 2000.



Meeting Pope John Paul II at the Vatican during Madiba’s state visit.

11. Ek ontmoet pous Johannes Paulus II by die Vatikaan tydens Madiba se besoek.



A silhouette of Madiba on board our presidential plane, the Falcon 900, 1998/9.

6. ’ n Silhoeët van Madiba aan boord van die presidensiële vliegtuig, die Falcon 900, in 1998/’99.



Adjusting Madiba’s hearing aids at an event at the Nelson Mandela Foundation.

12.Ek verstel Madiba se gehoorapparaat tydens ’n geleentheid by die Nelson Mandela-stigting.



Seeing Madiba off outside the office after his day at work.

13. Ek sien Madiba af buite die kantore ná sy dag se werk.



Christmas in Qunu, with Madiba and Mum in the early 2000s.

14. Kersfees in Qunu, saam met Madiba en Mum, vroeg in die dekade 2000.



During the launch of the 46664 campaign in Cape Town, 2003,
Bono and The Edge visit Madiba at his house in Cape Town.

15. Tydens die bekendstelling van die 46664-veldtog in Kaapstad, 2003. Bono en The Edge van U2 besoek Madiba by sy huis in Kaapstad.



Keeping Madiba busy in the office while we wait for the mould of his hand to set. The cast of his hand was sold at his ninetieth birthday celebration in London.

16. Ek hou Madiba in die kantoor besig terwyl ons wag dat die gietvorm van sy hand hard word. Die afgietsel van sy hand is by die viering van sy negentigste verjaardag in Londen verkoop.



Photo taken in 2008 while I was busy explaining to Madiba how a cast would be made of his hand. The hand that changed my entire being.

17. Dié foto is in 2008 geneem terwyl ek besig was om aan Madiba te verduidelik hoe 'n afgietsel van sy hand gemaak gaan word. Die hand wat my hele wese verander het.

Acknowledgements

I need a separate book to thank all the people who have contributed to or played a role in my life over the last forty-three years. I may forget many names here and in that case I apologize in advance. In a very strange way, even the people who I felt hurt by played a role in shaping me. Every person that crossed my path blessed me irrespective of the role they played in my life.

* * *

I pay tribute to people who have suffered and sacrificed paving the way for me to have the freedoms that I now enjoy in this beautiful country of ours.

‘I am because you are.’ I thank my parents Des and Yvonne la Grange. I love you more than you will ever comprehend. I don’t show it often and indeed I am strange being, but I hope you know how much I appreciate your unconditional love and support. You laid the foundation for discipline, principle, the morals and values I cling to today. Commitment, loyalty and determination I inherited from you. I know what it is to love because of you. To my brother Anton and his partner Rick Venter, my second brother, thank you for always being there, and if no one else could be trusted, you stood firm. Thank you for the encouragement, unwavering support and taking care of me. You are my rock.

To the rest of my family, the La Grange’s and Strydoms thank you.

To Maretha Slabbert, my long-serving and -suffering colleague, thank you for sticking it out with me. We shared the best times but also the worst. I will love you for ever.

To my long-time friend Jennifer Preller, for your support and motherhood. I remain grateful to have a friend care for me the way

you do. Thank you for pushing me beyond what I thought were my limits and for constantly adjusting my attitude and making me strong.

The godparents to my dogs, Johrne and Alet van Huyssteen, I cannot imagine life without you. You lived in my house at one stage more than I did. Thanks for being there at the drop of a hat to care for my house, my dogs and for me and sometimes picking up the pieces. I cannot wait for us to sit on the porch of the old age home together.

To the friend that kept my mind sane and clear Dr Ralf Brummerhof. Thank you for being there to count on, day or night, and even the knee jerk exercises.

To Robyn Curnow and Kim Norgaard and their children Freya and Hella, thank you for an instant family and an enormously privileged and trusted friendship we share.

To Douw and Carolyn Steyn, thank you for loving me and caring the way you do.

For guidance, protection and invaluable wisdom, thank you my pact: Minee Hendricks, Marli Hoffman, Ann-Lee Murray, Lori McCreary, Anele Mdoda, Sara Latham, Dianne Broodryk.

* * *

To some very special friends, some associates and a special breed of people thank you for blessing my life in one way or another with your kindness, support or even just consideration: Constant and Hane Visser, Rian van Heerden, Gareth Cliff, Doug Band, Jon Davidson, Justin Cooper, Matt McKenna, Marius van Vuuren, Ian Douglas, Lucy Matthew, Catriona Garde, Rory Steyn, Elaine Saloner, Roddy Quinn, Kim Mari, Basetsana Khumalo, Johanna Mukoki, Rebs Mogoba, Mashadi Motlana, De Villiers Pienaar, Wayne Hendricks, Henk Opperman, Adriaan and Cecile Basson, George Ludeke, Waldimar Pelser, Pauli Massyn, George Cohen, Jonathan Butt, Matthew and Tracy Barnes, Dan Ntsala, Dot Field, Greg Coetzee, Rob and Amanda Flemming, Libby Moore, Jovita Machel, Patricia Machel, Lisa Halliday, Cora Forsmann, Tracy Davenport, Silvia Viljoen, Attie van Wyk, Artem and Sayora Gregorian, Huma Abedin, Sonja and Coetzee Zietsman, Hannah Richert, Deon Broodryk, Driki van Zyl, Hein and Helmien Bezuidenhout, Deon and Yzelle Stone, Angie Khumalo, Gretchen de Smit, Tinus and Chelyn Nel, Annie Laughton, Adrian Brink, Beverly Loxton, Jean Oelwang, Pieter de Waal and Janice Ferrante, Darren Scott, Donne Nicoll, John Carlin, Thato and Thabiso

Sikwane, Niel and Andrea Viljoen, TJ, Louis, Tanya and Liz Steyn, Arpad Busson, Rina Broomberg, Ami Desai, Bryan and Jenine Habana, John and Roxy Smith, Schalk and Michelle Burger, Ryk Neethling, Tim and Clare Massey, Jerry and Prudence Inzerillo, Marilyn Karstaedt, Barbara Hogan, Jabu Mabuza, Graham Wood, Alan Knott-Craig, Mthobi Tyamzashe, Norman Adami, Don and Liz Gips, Rob and Lawri Brozin, Kevin Wilson, Dan Moyana, Karlheinz Koegel, Andrew Mlangeni, Olivia Machel, Frank Guistra, Susan Kriegler, Jogabeth and Esau Shilaluke, Oprah, Gayle King, Richard Friedland, HRH King Willem Alexander and HRH Queen Maxima, Former President Thabo and Mrs Zanele Mbeki, Former President F W de Klerk and Elita de Klerk, Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe, Judge Themba Sangoni, Khanyi Dhlomo, Unathi Msengane, Shiela Sisulu, Faizal and Malaika Motlekar, Jonathan and Jennifer Oppenheimer, Nicky Oppenheimer,Gavin Koppel, Tommy Erasmus, Bongi Mkhabela, Charles Priebatch, the Kunene brothers, Cyril Ramaphosa, David Rockefeller, Leon Vermaak, Benny Gool, Roger Friedman, Mac Maharaj, Archbishop Thabo Mokgoba, Anant and Vaneshree Singh, Bishop Malusi Mpulwana, Robyn Farrell, Dr Mike Plit, Prince Bandar, Jolene Chait, Alfre Woodard, Roderick Spencer, Yusuf Surtee, Sharon Stone, Arki Busson, Charlize Theron, Advocate Thuli Madonsela, Zwelinzima Vavi, Nigel Badminton, Mauro Governato, Ben King, Whitey Basson, Wendy Luhabe, Bernard Krige, Vincent Maphai, Koos Bekker, Fred Phaswana, Ton Vosloo, Chris Liebenberg, Jeff and Bridgette Radebe, Roshann Paris, Joel Johnson, Amy Weinblum, Esmare Weideman, Denese Palm, Ayanda Dlodlo, Minister Nosiviwe Nqakula, Mayor David Dinkins, Forest and Keisha Whitaker, Prof. Jonathan Jansen, Zindzi Mandela, Zoleka Mandela, Chief Zwelivelile Mandela, Chief Ngangomhlaba Matanzima, Bantu Holomisa, Patekile Holomisa, Zolani Mkiva, Phoebe Gerwel, Jessie Gerwel, Joseph Kruger. Zondwa Mandela, Mbuso Mandela, Andile Mandela, Zinhle Mandela, Luvuyo Mandela and Nandi Mandela.

* * *

To Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Ahmed Kathrada, President Clinton, Secretary Hillary Clinton, Chelsea Clinton, Bono, Ali, Sol and Andrea Kerzner, Naomi Campbell, Richard Branson, Peter Gabriel, Morgan Freeman, Peggy Dulany and their respective staff thank you for the love and support. My life had been blessed beyond measure having

had the privilege to know you.

* * *

To Johann and Gaynor Rupert, thank you for loving and caring.

Frederick and Natasha Mostert, thank you for believing in me, inspiring me and the many many hours of legal consultation, support, guidance but also a privileged friendship.

Jeremy Gauntlett, thank you for your expert advice, support and consultation.

Bally Chuene, Michael Katz and Wim Trengove, Uncle George Bizos and family thank you for your support over the years and always making time and effort with me.

To Sacha and Christa Held, for allowing me to work on the book at their house in Mauritius, thank you.

To all my colleagues from the Presidency and the Nelson Mandela Foundation, some of whom I have lost contact with, thank you for your patience and tolerance. Special thanks to those I have worked closely with or over long periods of time: Lois Dippenaar, Virginia Engel, Alan Pillay, Vimla Naidoo, Elize Wessels, Morris Chabalala, Meshack Mochele, Joel Netshitenzhe, Tony Trew, Fink Haysom, Fanie Pretorius, William Smith, Gerrit Wissing, Marieta van Rensburg, Hayley Lyners, Pam Barron, Shaun Johnson, Heather Henriques, Lydia Baylis, Jackie Maggot, Meme Kgagare, Betty Dima, Xoliswa Ndoyiya, Gloria Nocanda, Yase Godlo, John Samuel, Achmat Dangor, Marianne Mudziwa, Denise Pillay, Shereen Petersen, Buyi Sishuba, Thoko Mavuso, Gloria Jafta, Maeline Engelbrecht, Ruth Rensburg, Lee Davies, Tania Arrison, Elaine McKay, Marie Vos, Dudu Buthelezi, Jo Ditabo, Makano Morojelo, Merlyn van Voore, Mothomang Diaho, Ethel Arendze, Sandy Pillay, Ella Govender, Shirley Naidoo and anyone else I may have forgotten.

Thank you Prof Njabulo Ndebele, Chairman of the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the CEO of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, Sello Hatang, for your leadership and wisdom.

* * *

Special thanks to Verne Harris from the Centre of Memory at the Nelson Mandela Foundation for helping with factual correctness of this book and for your cameraderie.

All members of the Presidential Protection Unit and the South African Airforce who I worked closely with and that served with diligence, thank you.

The passionate and professional medical staff from the SANDF and private hospitals that cared for Madiba and Mum, thank you.

* * *

The staff of the 1st for Women Insurance Trust and Beeld Children's fund.

In memorium: My grandparents on both sides of the family, thank you. Special people who have passed on: Chief Justice Arthur Chaskalson, Oom Beyers Naude, Sean Chabalala, Mary Mxadana, John Reinders, Parks Mankahlana, Eric Molobi, Aggrey Klaaste, Dullah Omar, Marinus Daling, Miriam Makeba, Steve Tshwete, Uncle Raymond Mhlaba, Kader Asmal, Aunt Adelaide Tambo, Uncle Walter and Aunt Albertina Sisulu, Makgatho Mandela, Zenani Mandela Jnr.

Thank you my Prof., Jakes Gerwel. I still miss you every day. You enriched my life both professionally and personally in ways beyond comprehension and I am the most fortunate and blessed to have worked so closely with you. I will pay tribute to you with deep appreciation for the role you played in Madiba, Mum and my life, for the rest of my days.

My expert agent Jonny Geller, Kirsten Foster, Anna Davis and the team at Curtis Brown, thank you.

Helen Conford, Penelope Vogler, Richard Duguid, Rebecca Lee, Casiana Ionita and the team at Penguin, with deep appreciation for your enthusiasm and support. Also to Stephen Johnson, Frederik de Jager, Ellen van Schalkwyk and all at Penguin South Africa. And to Clare Ferraro, Wendy Wolf and all at Penguin US.

To all my friends in the media, too many to mention, thank you for your patience and understanding and even for our differences in opinion some times. Thank you for showing me how to grow a back bone.

To everyone who took my call when you no longer had to . . . THANK YOU!

To the unfamiliar face of the black man who comforted me at Madiba's funeral. If I don't get to thank you in person, this is it.

* * *

To everyone who spared me a smile, a hug or a word of encouragement over 19 years, I salute you with gratitude.

To Mrs Graça Machel, my second Mum and her children, Josina, Malenga and Samora, thank you for accepting me as your family and for caring for me like I am your own. I love you with the same unconditional love that Madiba taught us. I will remain forever indepted to you with love, care and appreciation and I will keep my promise to Madiba, but also willfully so, to care for you for as long as I live.

Lastly, but most importantly, thank you Khulu!

Erkennings

Ek sou ’n aparte boek nodig gehad het om al die mense te bedank wat die afgelope drie-en-veertig jaar tot my lewe bygedra of ’n rol daarin gespeel het. Dalk gaan ek hier ’n klomp name vergeet en ek vra by voorbaat om verskoning. Op ’n baie vreemde manier voel ek selfs die mense wat my seergemaak het, het my help vorm. Elkeen wat oor my pad gekom het, was ’n seën, ongeag die rol wat hulle gespeel het.

Ek bring hulde aan mense wat swaargekry en opofferings gemaak het om die weg te baan vir die vryhede wat ek nou in hierdie pragtige land van ons geniet.

‘Ek is omdat julle is.’ Ek bedank hiermee my ouers, Des en Yvonne la Grange. Ek het julle liewer as wat julle ooit sal verstaan. Ek wys dit nie baie nie en ek is inderdaad ’n vreemdse skepseltjie, maar ek hoop julle weet hoe baie ek jul onvoorwaardelike liefde en ondersteuning waardeer. Julle het die grondslag gelê vir die dissipline, waardes en morele standaarde waaraan ek vandag vashou. Ek het my lojaliteit, pligsbesef en vasbeslotenheid by julle geëerf. Danksy julle weet ek wat dit beteken om lief te hê. Aan my broer, Anton, en sy lewensmaat, Rick Venter, my tweede broer, sê ek dankie omdat julle altyd daar is, en wanneer ek niemand anders kon vertrou nie, het julle vasgestaan.

Dankie vir die aanmoediging, onwrikbare ondersteuning en omdat julle na my omgesien het. Julle is my rots.

Aan die res van my familie, die La Grange's en Strydoms, dankie.

Aan Maretha Slabbert, my jare lange kollega, vir wie dit nie altyd maklik was nie, sê ek dankie dat jy dit by my uitgehou het. Ons het die goeie en die slegte tye saam meegemaak. Ek sal altyd lief bly vir jou.

Aan Jennifer Preller, vir jou steun en moederskap oor die baie jare van ons vriendskap. Ek bly dankbaar vir 'n vriendin wat na my omsien soos jy. Dankie dat jy my help om grense oor te steek van dit wat ek as my beperkings beskou, en dat jy my houding deurgaans aanpas en my sterk maak.

My honde se peetouers, Johrné en Alet van Huyssteen, ek kan my nie 'n lewe sonder julle indink nie. In 'n stadium het julle meer in my huis gebly as ek. Dankie dat julle op kort kennisgewing na my huis, my honde en na my omgesien het, en soms die stukkies opgetel het. Ek kan nie wag vir die dag wanneer ons drie saam op die ouetehuis se voorstoep sit nie.

Aan die vriend wat my verstand helder en gesond gehou het, dokter Ralf Brummerhof. Dankie dat ek dag en nag op jou kon reken.

Aan Robyn Curnow en Kim Norgaard en hul kinders, Freya en Hella, dankie vir die kitsfamilie en die enorme bevoorregte en vertroude vriendskap wat ons deel.

Aan Douw en Carolyn Steyn, dankie vir die manier waarop julle vir my liefde gee en na my omsien.

Vir leiding en onmeetbare wysheid, dankie aan my verbond: Minèe Hendricks, Marli Hoffman, Ann-Lee Murray, Lori McCreary, Anele Mdoda, Sara Latham en Dianne Broodryk.

Aan 'n groep baie spesiale vriende, kennisse en 'n baie uitsonderlike spesie wat my lewe op een of ander manier geseën het, wil ek dankie sê vir jul goedhartigheid, ondersteuning of selfs net die feit dat julle my in ag geneem het: Constant en Hane Visser, Rian van Heerden, Gareth Cliff, Doug Band, Jon Davidson, Justin Cooper, Matt McKenna, Marius van Vuuren, Ian Douglas, Lucy Matthew, Catriona Garde, Rory Steyn, Elaine Saloner, Roddy Quinn, Kim Mari, Basetsana Kumalo, Johanna Mukoki, Rebs Mogoba, Mashadi Motlana, De Villiers Pienaar,

Wayne Hendricks, Henk Opperman, Adriaan en Cecile Basson, George Ludeke, Waldimar Pelser, Pauli Massyn, George Cohen, Jonathan Butt, Matthew en Tracy Barnes, Dan Ntsala, Dot Field, Greg Coetzee, Rob en Amanda Flemming, Libby Moore, Jovita Machel, Patricia Machel, Lisa Halliday, Cora Forsmann, Tracy Davenport, Silvia Viljoen, Attie van Wyk, Artem en Sayora Gregorian, Huma Abedin, Sonja en Coetzee Zietsman, Hannah Richert, Deon Broodryk, Driki van Zyl, Hein en Helmien Bezuidenhout, Deon en Yzelle Stone, Angie Khumalo, Gretchen de Smit, Tinus en Chelyn Nel, Annie Laughton, Adrian Brink, Beverly Loxton, Jean Oelwang, Pieter de Waal en Janice Ferrante, Darren Scott, Donne Nicoll, John Carlin, Thato en Thabiso Sikwane, Niel en Andrea Viljoen, TJ, Louis, Tanya en Liz Steyn, Arpad Busson, Rina Broomberg, Ami Desai, Bryan en Jenine Habana, John en Roxy Smith, Schalk en Michelle Burger, Ryk Neethling, Tim en Clare Massey, Jerry en Prudence Inzerillo, Marilyn Karstaedt, Barbara Hogan, Jabu Mabuza, Graham Wood, Alan Knott-Craig, Mthobi Tyamzashe, Norman Adami, Don en Liz Gips, Rob en Lawri Brozin, Kevin Wilson, Dan Moyana, Karlheinz Koegel, Andrew Mlangeni, Olivia Machel, Frank Guistra, Susan Kriegler, Jogabeth en Esau Shilaluke, Oprah, Gayle King, Richard Friedland, koning Willem Alexander en koningin Maxima, oudpresident Thabo en mevrou Zanele Mbeki, oudpresident F.W. de Klerk en mevrou Elita de Klerk, adjunkpresident Kgalema Motlanthe, regter Themba Sangoni, Khanyi Dhlomo, Unathi Msengane, Shiela Sisulu, Faizal en Malaika Motlekar, Jonathan en Jennifer Oppenheimer, Nicky Oppenheimer, Gavin Koppel, Tommy Erasmus, Bongi Mkhabela, Charles Priebatch, die Kunene-broers, Cyril Ramaphosa, David Rockefeller, Leon Vermaak, Benny Gool, Roger Friedman, Mac Maharaj, aartsbiskop Thabo Mokgoba, Anant en Vaneshree Singh, biskop Malusi Mpulwana, Robyn Farrell, dokter Mike Plit, prins Bandar, Jolene Chait, Alfre Woodard, Roderick Spencer, Yusuf Surtee, Sharon Stone, Arki Busson, Charlize Theron, advokaat Thuli Madonsela, Zwelinzima Vavi, Nigel Badminton, Mauro Governato, Ben King, Whitey Basson, Wendy Luhabe, Bernard Krige, Vincent Maphai, Koos Bekker, Fred Phaswana, Ton Vosloo, Chris Liebenberg, Jeff en Bridgette Radebe, Roshann Paris, Joel Johnson, Amy Weinblum, Esmare Weideman, Denese Palm, Ayanda Dlodlo, minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, burgemeester

David Dinkins, Forest en Keisha Whitaker, professor Jonathan Jansen, Zindzi Mandela, Zoleka Mandela, hoofman Zwelivelile Mandela, hoofman Ngangomhlaba Matanzima, Bantu Holomisa, Patekile Holomisa, Zolani Mkiva, Phoebe Gerwel, Jessie Gerwel, Joseph Kruger, Zondwa Mandela, Mbuso Mandela, Andile Mandela, Zinhle Mandela, Luvuyo Mandela en Nandi Mandela.

Aan emeritus-aartsbiskop doktor Desmond Tutu, Ahmed Kathrada, oudpresident Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton, Chelsea Clinton, Bono, Ali, Sol en Andrea Kerzner, Naomi Campbell, sir Richard Branson, Peter Gabriel, Morgan Freeman, Peggy Dulany en hul onderskeie spanne, dankie vir die liefde en ondersteuning. My lewe is op 'n onmeetbare wyse geseën deurdat ek julle leer ken het.

Aan Johann en Gaynor Rupert, dankie vir jul liefde en die feit dat julle omgee.

Frederick en Natasha Mostert, dankie dat julle in my glo en my inspireer en vir die baie ure se regskonsultasie, ondersteuning, leiding en 'n gewaardeerde vriendskap.

Jeremy Gauntlett, dankie vir jou kennersadvies, ondersteuning en konsultasie.

Bally Chuene, Michael Katz en Wim Trengove, oom George Bizos en familie, dankie vir julle steun oor die jare en omdat julle altyd moeite gedoen en vir my 'n tydjie ingeruim het.

Aan Sacha en Christa Held, dankie dat ek by jul huis in Mauritius aan die boek kon werk.

Aan al my kollegas van die presidensie en die Nelson Mandela-stigting met wie ek nie almal kontak behou het nie, dankie vir jul geduld en verdraagsaamheid. Spesiale dank aan almal wat lank nou saam met my gewerk het: Loïs Dippenaar, Virginia Engel, Alan Pillay, Vimla Naidoo, Elize Wessels, Morris Chabalala, Meshack Mochele, Joel Netshitenzhe, Tony Trew, Fink Haysom, Fanie Pretorius, William Smith, Gerrit Wissing, Marieta van Rensburg, Hayley Lyners, Pam Barron, Shaun Johnson, Heather Henriques, Lydia Baylis, Jackie Maggot, Meme Kgagare, Betty Dima, Xoliswa Ndoyiya, Gloria Nocanda, Yase Godlo, John Samuel, Achmat Dangor, Marianne Mudziwa, Denise Pillay, Shereen Petersen, Buyi Sishuba, Thoko Mavuso, Gloria Jafta, Maeline Engelbrecht, Ruth Rensburg, Lee

Davies, Tania Arrison, Elaine McKay, Marie Vos, Dudu Buthelezi, Jo Ditabo, Makano Morojelo, Merlyn van Voore, Mothomang Diaho, Ethel Arendze, Sandy Pillay, Ella Govender, Shirley Naidoo en enigeen wat ek dalk vergeet het.

My dank aan professor Njabulo Ndebele, voorsitter van die Nelson Mandela-stigting, Sello Hatang, uitvoerende hoof van die Nelson Mandela-stigting, vir jul leierskap en wysheid.

Spesiale dank aan Verne Harris van die Herinneringsentrum by die Nelson Mandela-stigting wat gehelp het om feite na te gaan en vir jou kameraadskap.

Alle lede van die presidensiële beskermingseenheid en die Suid-Afrikaanse Lugmag met wie ek nou saamgewerk het en wat met ywer gedien het.

Aan die toegewyde en professionele mediese personeel van die Suid-Afrikaanse Nasionale Weermag en private hospitale wat na Madiba en Mum omgesien het, dankie.

Die personeel van 1st for Women-versekeringstrust en *Beeld* se kinderfonds.

In memoriam: My grootouers aan beide kante van die familie, dankie. Spesiale mense wat nie meer daar is nie: hoofregter Arthur Chaskalson, oom Beyers Naudé, Sean Chabalala, Mary Mxadana, John Reinders, Parks Mankahlana, Eric Molobi, Aggrey Klaaste, Dullah Omar, Marinus Daling, Miriam Makeba, Steve Tshwete, oom Raymond Mhlaba, Kader Asmal, tannie Adelaide Tambo, oom Walter en tannie Albertina Sisulu, Makgatho Mandela en Zenani Mandela jr.

Dankie aan my Prof, Jakes Gerwel. Ek verlang elke dag. Jy het my professionele en persoonlike lewe op onbegryplike maniere verryk en ek is die gelukkigste en mees geseënde wese om so nou met jou te kon saamwerk. Ek bring hulde aan jou met diepe en oneindige waardering vir die rol wat jy in my lewe, Madiba s'n en Mum s'n gespeel het.

Aan my kundige agent Jonny Geller, Kirsten Foster, Anna Davis en die span by Curtis Brown, dankie.

Helen Conford, Penelope Vogler, Richard Duguid, Rebecca Lee, Casiana Ionita en die span by Penguin, met diepe waardering vir jul geesdrif en ondersteuning. Ook aan Stephen Johnson, Frederik de Jager, Ellen van Schalkwyk, Melt Myburgh en almal by Penguin Suid-Afrika. En aan Clare Ferraro, Wendy Wolf en almal by Penguin VSA.

Aan al my vriende in die media, wat te veel is om op te noem, dankie vir jul geduld en begrip en selfs vir ons meningsverskille dan en wan. Dankie dat julle my geleer het om 'n ruggraat te kweek.

Aan elkeen wat my oproepe ontvang het toe dit nie meer vir julle nodig was nie … DANKIE!

Aan die swart man met die onbekende gesig wat my by Madiba se begrafnis getroos het: As ek jou nie van aangesig tot aangesig kan bedank nie, doen ek dit hier.

Aan almal wat in negentien jaar 'n glimlag, 'n drukkie of 'n woord van aanmoediging vir my gehad het, ek salueer julle met dank.

Aan mevrou Graça Machel – Mum, my tweede ma – en haar kinders, Josina, Malenga en Samora, dankie dat julle my as familie aanvaar het en na my soos jul eie omgesien het. Ek het vir julle die onvoorwaardelike liefde wat Madiba ons geleer het. Aan julle is ek liefde, waardering en sorg verskuldig en ek sal my belofte aan Madiba nakom, maar ook uit vrye wil, en aanhou omgee solank as wat ek leef.

Laastens, die belangrikste: dankie aan u, Khulu!